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by Edmond Hamilton

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

OCTOBER
1956

VOLUME 7
NUMBER 5

IMAGINATION
STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

DECEMBER ISSUE ON SALE
SEPTEMBER 27th

Stories

CITADEL OF THE STAR LORDS

(Complete Novel)by Edmond Hamilton 8
Alien hordes ruled Earth's far future, except for one person—a man from the past!

TROUBLE ON SUN-SIDE

(Short Story)by S. M. Tenneshaw 66
Jansen was looking for one man on Mercury—if he found him somebody would die!

WORLD OF THE HUNTER

(Short Story)by C. H. Thames 80
Mulveen wanted the ultimate in big-game thrills—for nobody had ever stalked Man!

JOHN HARPER'S INSIGHT

(Short Story)by Dick Purcell 94
Harper's mind breached Time catching a newflash before it happened. Tragically.

DAY OF THE COMET

(Short Story)by Ivar Jorgensen 98
If your world was soon to be destroyed what would you do? Pray? Repent? Perhaps!

CENTAURI VENGEANCE

(Short Story)by Darius John Granger 104
George Haven feared no man in the galaxy. Yet even Haven was afraid—of himself!

Features

THE EDITORIAL 6
TEMPERATURE STUDY 79
THOUGHT-DETECTOR 92
A SHORTAGE OF THE FUTURE 112

FANDORA'S BOX 114
SCIENCE FICTION LIBRARY 122
LETTERS FROM THE READERS 124
SUBSCRIPTION-BOOK OFFER 130

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To the man who wants to enjoy an ACCOUNTANT'S CAREER . . .



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The Editorial

THE other night we had the pleasure (for a change) of attending the local theatre's showing of Hollywood's latest science fiction film, *Forbidden Planet*. At this writing we regret we didn't see it sooner so that we might have written this review for the August issue.

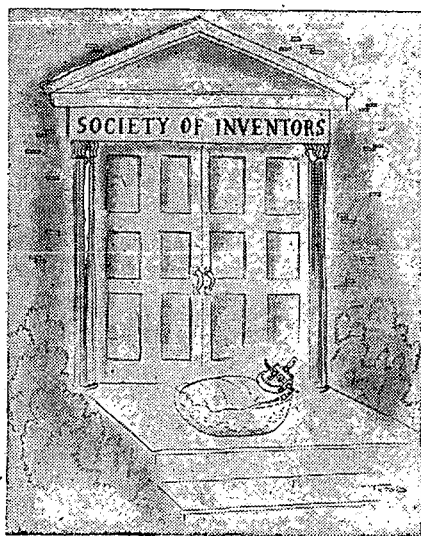
IN a nutshell we were quite impressed with the picture. Aided by technicolor and Cinemascope MGM has produced a film which in our opinion brings to the viewer a quality lacking from most other sf films—believability. For the first time we had the feeling we were actually travelling through deep space to visit another world. And believe us, that alien planet was something to see.

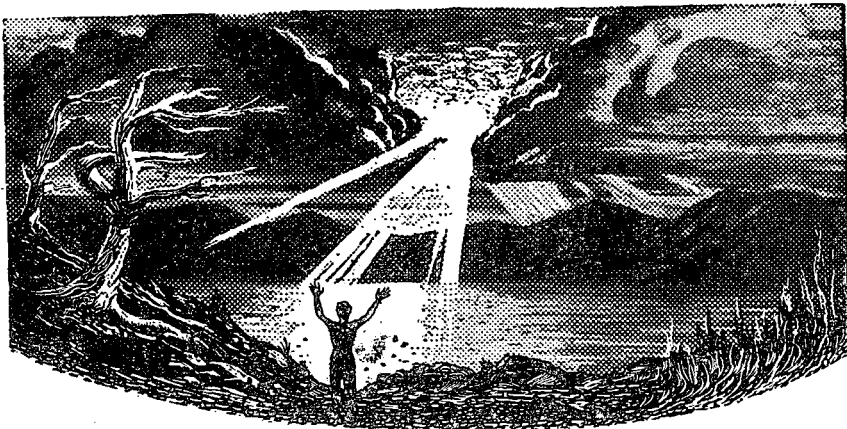
BRIEFLY, the planet had been inhabited by a super race called the *Krell*. Delving into super-science the race had destroyed itself, but its technology, incredible to comprehend, continued on through the ages. In essence the planet was one vast maze of machines, self-perpetuating and awesome to behold.

THE story itself is of secondary importance, although from an entertainment standpoint it was certainly adequate. The item of interest to us was the superb use of

special effects which MGM employed (working in collaboration with the Disney studios). The sight of banks of machines stretching perhaps miles high, pulsing with untold power was completely believable — you felt they actually existed. And that's quite a feat.

WE'VE heard the film cost over a million to produce. Not surprising. We venture to say that the gross will be quite a few million. Proving that the public will pay to see something good. *Forbidden Planet* is very good. If you haven't seen it, make a point to do so . . . wll





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It is inconceivable that the vast, orderly universal Intelligence we observe

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CITADEL OF THE STAR LORDS

by

Edmond Hamilton

**Out of the dark vastness of the void came
a conquering horde, incredible and invincible,
with Earth's only weapon — a man from the past!**

AS HE GUNNED his plane northward through the night, Price thought of the roller-coaster when he'd been a kid, of how you went faster and faster

until you hit the big plunge.

Well, he was on the big plunge now. And what would end this roller-coaster ride - - - prison, or escape, or a crash? It had to be

one of those.

He was to remember that, later. He was to think later that it was well he didn't dream the fantastic fate he was really racing toward

He looked down, and there was only blackness. The deserts of California and Nevada are dark and wide, and he was keeping well away from the airways beacons and the main highways.

He kept the Beechcraft as high as he could. He was flying without lights, but with what they already had against him, that minor infraction wasn't important. He kept looking back, expecting every minute to see the red-and-green winglights of Border Patrol planes coming up on his tail.

If he was lucky, if he slipped them long enough, if he crossed north without being sighted by the passenger planes that shuttled between Las Vegas and Los Angeles, he might just make it to Bill Willerman's and get the Beechcraft under cover. If - - if - - if - -

There was another if, Price thought bitterly. If he'd had any brains, he wouldn't be in this spot at all.

He turned on the radio. He flipped the dial around, getting loud music from a Vegas hotel, then a political speech, then more music - - - and then a news broad-

cast. As he'd expected, he was at the top of the news.

" - - - so that even while Arnolfo Ruiz, firebrand revolutionary exile, is under arrest by Mexican police, United States authorities are conducting an intensive air-dragnet search for the American pilot who smuggled Ruiz across the border. That unknown pilot is known to have returned across the border an hour ago, and police of three states have been alerted.

"The AEC announces that its next test will be that of an experimental small new H-bomb whose effects will be studied for - - -"

Price savagely cut the radio. He damned the announcer, and Ruiz, and himself. Most of all, himself.

He'd acted like a halfwit. Because a smooth talker had given him a phony story about a secret business trip, he had smuggled the most dangerous trouble-maker in the hemisphere down into a friendly republic. Who would believe he hadn't known? He *had* done it, and pressure from Washington would make sure that he got full pay for his folly.

He might as well look the truth in the face. If it hadn't been this, it would have been something else. He'd been playing the fool for years, ever since Korea. Other

fliers had come home from there and taken up their jobs again, but a job had been too dull for him; he'd drifted along with the fast-buck fly-boys out for fun and excitement, hauling hunting and fishing parties, spending the profits in bordertown bars, going broke and starting over again - - - and now finally this. His roller-coaster ride was about over.

It would be over for good if he didn't reach Willerman's ranch before daylight. Bill would hide the plane for him. He'd saved Bill's neck a couple of times in the old days, and he could depend on him. But he had to reach him, first.

He saw the glow in the sky that came from the lights of Las Vegas, and he kept warily wide of it. He looked back again. No Patrol planes yet. As he rushed on, Price began to feel that he was going to make it.

Then, suddenly and disastrously, everything happened at once.

He saw lights on the ground ahead - - - an oddly scattered pattern of lights too thin to be a town, too wide-spread to be a ranch.

At the same moment, two fast jets screamed down from the upper darkness and nearly tore his wings off. They curved around for another pass at him.

"Air Force planes!" thought

Price. "Hell, that tears it - - -"

It seemed crazy that the government was *that* hot to catch him. But the jets were making another lightning pass to him, trying to scare him, to force him down.

He had less than a chance in a million to lose them, and he knew it. But he was going to be a long time in jail, and he might as well give them a run for it. Just possibly, the slower Beechcraft could get away in the dark the next time they overshot him.

He gunned the plane wide open, rushing high over the scattered lights. And then, incredibly, he was free of his pursuers. He looked over his shoulder and saw them drawing back.

It didn't make sense. Why would they suddenly draw back? Anyway, with those jets off his tail, he still had a chance.

Price looked down. Among the lights down there he saw lights on a queer steel tower. He'd seen pictures of a tower like that somewhere. It wasn't an oil-rig, but something he couldn't remember.

And then, suddenly, he remembered, and a terrible coldness choked him and his flesh flinched as he saw a door into nightmare opening.

That tower, and the announcement of a new H-bomb test, and the distance he was from Vegas,

and the way those frantic jets had drawn back . . .

"Oh, no," said Price. "Oh, no, oh no, oh no - - -"

He was still saying it when the bomb went off and the universe cracked wide open under his racing plane.

CHAPTER II

THE CATACLYSM that hit Price was without light or sound. That, when he thought of it later, was the most awful feature of it.

He felt a shock, but not the shock of ultimate annihilation he expected. This was a shuddering impact as of the plane, himself, hitting some barrier and forcing through, a rending, tearing, dizzying thing that was like no sensation he had ever experienced.

He yelled, naked terror forcing the air from his lungs. His weight flung against the straps, and he knew from that that the plane was in a spin. Mechanically, his hands reached to the controls. He levelled off

But he wasn't dead. He was alive, undestroyed, and how could that be if the raving energies of a hydrogen bomb had been unloosed beneath him?

Price's mind was a mad turmoil. What had happened?

He had blundered right over the bomb test-area, right over the bomb-tower. And the jets guarding the area had tried to stop him. Probably, if his radio hadn't been off, he would have heard them screaming frantic warnings to him.

But had the bomb really gone off? If it had, he would surely have been instantly annihilated.

He hadn't been. He was alive. The plane was ticking along through the night. The instruments functioned.

But *something* terrific had happened. That ghastly, wrenching shock that had seemed to outrage the very atoms of his body - - - his flesh still crawled with the memory of it. Something had happened. But what?

Price couldn't think. The mind just could not grapple with a thing like this. He sat, mechanically touching the controls, and the Beechcraft roared on and on.

Gradually, his mind came alive. He shakily swung the plane around. He was going back to Las Vegas. Right now, arrest and prison looked good to him compared to what had happened, or nearly happened.

If he hadn't been so tensely trying to escape, he thought, he would have remembered about the bomb-tests coming up. There had been newspaper stories. Guarded

stories about a radical physical effect detected during explosions of the new-type H-bombs, and mention of elaborate preparations being made to study these unusual effects.

Price's thoughts leaped suddenly. He recalled a scientist's statement that the center of explosion of the new-type bomb might be like the eye of a hurricane, a focus of inconceivable forces but affected in a radically different way by those forces.

Had the bomb gone off under him, then? Had his plane and himself, at the "eye" of the tremendous explosion, been hurled somehow through spatial barriers into safety before the light and sound and destruction could even reach him?

It seemed an insane speculation. Yet everything about this was insane. He would be himself, if he didn't get down to Earth soon.

He could not see the glow of Las Vegas anywhere in the night. He cut his radio in and spoke hoarsely into it.

"Beechcraft 4556 calling Las Vegas Airport! Come in, Las Vegas!"

There was no answer. The radio seemed operative - - - but when he turned the receiver dials, not a sound came out.

"Knocked out," Price muttered.

"And no wonder, if - - -"

He couldn't finish the thought, it was too soul-shaking a thing to speculate on, the thing that might have happened to him.

He curved the plane around, looking for highway lights, for an airways beacon, anything.

Nothing. Nothing but the darkness and the stars.

A LITTLE frantically, he swung the plane around and started eastward again. He must have missed Las Vegas. But if he kept going east, he'd surely cut the main highways. There were always lots of cars on them at night, in the summer.

He flew on and on. And the darkness continued. No lights at all, not even the glimmer from a lonely ranch.

Nothing.

He would have landed, gladly now, but he did not know where he was or what was under him. The Beechcraft was equipped with extra fuel tanks for long flights away from any source of supply, and they had been full when he started. He could fly a long time yet.

He flew.

After a while he began to think that there was only one explanation. He was dead, and flying in limbo.

And limbo, it seemed, went on forever.

Finally, after many hours there began to be a light in the blackness ahead of him, and his heart leaped up, thinking that at last he had raised the glow of a big town. But it was only the dawn. He watched it creep cold and gray across the world, and now he understood that he was alive. But he was not cheered. Now he could see what was underneath him.

Forest. Rolling like a dark green sea from north to south, from east to west. He had left the desert far behind. He figured that he was over Missouri now, and there should have been towns, villages, farms, cultivated fields.

There was forest.

The light turned rosy, then golden. The sun sprang up and it was day. Far ahead the Mississippi gleamed. Price sent the Beechcraft at full throttle, toward St. Louis. He could not see any smoke from the great complex of city and industry that sprawled there over both banks of the river, and he could not see any bridges. But St. Louis had to be there.

It was. But it had changed since he saw it last. The high buildings were brought low, and the low buildings were mounds, shells covered with brush and fox-grape, and trees grew in the public

streets and through the broken windows. The river, vast and placid, was empty except for a floating log. Obstructions along the shores might once have been docks, but were so no longer. And there was a great stillness.

For one wild moment Price thought, *The bomb did it last night, the new-type bomb with energies they didn't even dream about.* Then he realized that that was hardly possible. You can destroy a city with an H-bomb in a matter of seconds, but you can't grow an oak tree sixty feet high in the rubble of the City Hall in much under a century.

Time had passed since last night.

This was too much to take in all at once. Price didn't even try. He looked for a place to land, but there wasn't any, so he kept on flying, eastward across the river.

Time had passed, and he had passed with it. Slowly it began to come to Price, the dreadful and incredible truth of what had happened. The wrenching, tearing shock he had felt in the eye of the blast was not physical but temporal. The uncomprehended powers of the bomb had been mightier than anyone had guessed. They warped the ordered fabric of the space-time continuum itself, and acting on the matter of himself and his plane at the "eye" of the

explosion, had warped them too - - - into the future.

The Beechcraft went droning through the empty sky. Price looked down on desolation, green and peaceful and as unproductive as it had been before men ever came with axe and plow to tame it.

How far in the future?

He did not know.

Were there still men, surviving somewhere in this wilderness? Or had humanity destroyed itself in a final act of atomic madness? Were all the cities dead and dust?

He did not know that either.

He only knew that he was too numb and exhausted to go much farther. He had to have water and food and sleep. He had to have a place to land.

HE FOUND IT well beyond the river, a natural prairie in the midst of trees. He tried to gauge the way the wind was blowing by the ripple of the grass, and then he circled in a long curve to the north to head it. As he did so he thought he saw an iron glinting to the northeast, something very vast and strange as of the sun reflecting from a face of metal mountain-high and wide. Then he dropped low over the tree-tops, and whatever the glinting was he could not see it any more.

The Beechcraft bumped and

bounded to a stop. Price sat for a moment watching his hands shake on the controls, and then some last measure of caution made him taxi the plane back to the extreme edge of the prairie and nose it into the wind, ready to take off again with no delay.

He had a sporting rifle and revolver in the plane. He buckled on the revolver, stuffed his pockets full of cartridges for the rifle, and climbed down to the ground. He stood for several minutes in the shelter of the plane's wing, looking around, but he could not see any signs of life except a pair of crows flapping over his head with rusty cawing. It was late summer, and the wind was dry and hot. He began to walk toward the woods.

He looked a little dazedly, as he walked, toward the northeast. What was it, the incredible iron vastness he had glimpsed far away there?

About thirty yards from the plane Price stopped suddenly, his heart pounding and a sudden sweat breaking on his skin. The grass was trampled here in an irregular circle, with scars of bare earth ripped in the ground. There was a large quantity of blood, scarcely dry. A wide flattened track led to the woods. Something had been killed here, something big, like a horse or a cow, and the carcass

dragged in among the trees.

Men. Hunters. An animal would have devoured its kill where it lay.

But what kind of men?

Price stood half crouched over the bloody ground, his rifle ready, looking this way and that and seeing nothing. The hot wind went running over the prairie and the encircling trees bowed to it and tossed their branches, but there was no other motion, no other sound. Even the crows had gone.

Price shouted. "Hello! Hello! Is anybody there? I'm lost. I need help. Hello!"

His voice was shocking in the stillness, loud and impolite.

There was no answer.

He went on down the flattened track toward the trees. He was afraid, and desperately tired.

"Hello?" he said, and now his voice was pleading. "Please. Where are you? Help me - - -"

Help me, you men of an unknown future, you Hunters in impossibility, you lurkers in nightmare. Help me, or I die.

The shadows were heavy under the trees. The prairie grass did not grow here, but there were briars and other things to show a crushed trail. It was not a long one. He saw the carcass lying in a little glade. It was a black-and-white cow, already partially butchered.

He moved toward it, and then from the branches overhead and the underbrush on either side short ropes of braided leather came flying, weighted at their ends with stones. Price fell down helpless and floundering, painfully bruised, his arms and legs wrapped in the tough bolo-like ropes, and one around his neck cutting off his breath so he could not even cry out.

In a swift and furious rush six men sprang from among the trees and stood about him. One snatched his rifle, another his revolver. They wore sketchy garments of tanned leather, and they were as dark and wild as the Shawnees and Wyandots who had hunted these woodland prairies long ago, except that some of them had light hair and all of them were bearded.

One of them, a tall lean wide-shouldered man with a shock of sun-bleached brown hair and eyes more blue, more blazing and filled with hate than any Price could remember seeing in his life, crouched beside him and tore the strangling rope ungently from his neck. Price tried to speak, but before he could do more than gasp for breath the brown-haired man whipped out a knife and drove the point of it straight for Price's throat.

"Now," he said, "you star-

spawn - - - we'll see if your blood is any redder than the kind we breed on Earth!"

The steel bit hard. Price screamed.

CHAPTER III

THE BROWN-HAIRED man withdrew the knife with a nice dexterity, its tip reddened for perhaps a quarter of an inch. Price looked at it and at him in dumb horror. The six wolfish faces collected in a close circle above him and peered down, smiling.

"It's the same color, Burr. Who'd have thought it?"

"Just blood. Hah! And I always thought they'd bleed hard and shiny, like quicksilver."

"Stick him again, Burr."

"I wish we had time," said Burr, and licked his lips with a red tongue. "But they know where we are." He sighed and raised the knife again. "We got to get out of here. Fast."

Price found his voice. "For God's sake," he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing? I ask you for help, and you - - -". He struggled furiously against the ropes. "You haven't any right to kill me. I haven't done you any harm."

"Star-spawn," said Burr softly, using that word for the second time. He prodded Price above the

belt with the knife-point. "If I had time I'd do this slowly, very slowly. Be glad we don't have time."

"But why?" Price shouted. "What for?" He glared up at the circle of hairy faces. "I only got here today. I couldn't have done anything to you. I came from - - -"

From yesterday? A hundred years ago? Through time? Tell them, and ask them to believe it. Maybe they will. I don't.

"- - -from the West," he said. "From Nevada. I haven't anything to do with stars."

Burr laughed. He raised the knife. But another man, with a shrewd dark eye and gray hairs in his beard, caught his wrist.

"Wait a minute. Look at his hair. It's as dark as mine."

"Dyed," said Burr. "Look at his clothes. Look at the flier he came in, at his weapons. Look where he is - - - in the Forbidden Belt. If he isn't from the Citadel - - - don't be a foolish man, Twist. Let go."

"Why would he dye his hair to look like a human and then come to us in a flier? Is that reasonable? Now hold on, Burr. You hear me? There's a way to tell."

Burr grumbled, but he relaxed, and Twist let him go. He caught Price by the collar and dragged him into the glade by the butchered

cow, where the sunlight fell in strong shafts. Then he rolled Price's head back and forth, studying it with intense interest. The others looked over his shoulder.

"His eyes are dark too," said Twist. "You can't dye eyeballs. And look here. See that, Burr? Feel it. He's got the sproutings of a beard. Now we all know the Starlords don't grow hair on their lovely faces."

"Hey," said the others. "That's right. Twist is right."

"Of course he's right," said Price. "I'm human." He knew that much. The rest of the talk was a mystery, but that didn't matter. Not right now. "I come from the West. I'm a friend."

Burr looked sullen. "Humans don't fly. Only Starlords do that."

"Maybe he's a collaborator?" said a yellow-haired boy, all bright and eager, and Burr smiled again.

"Maybe. Anyway, he's none of us. Stand by, Twist."

But Twist did not stand by. He faced the others in fatherly anger at their stupidity.

"You're almighty anxious for a killing Burr. Now what's the Chief going to say when we come back and tell him that a human man came in an airplane, and asked us for help, and we stuck him like a pig and left the plane for the Star Lords?"

For some reason the word "plane" sobered them down and made them thoughtful. Twist pressed his advantage.

"You've all seen the old pictures. You know this flier isn't from the Citadel. It ain't the same shape and it don't make the same noise. It's a plane. Maybe the last one on Earth, and this man knows how to fly it. And you want to cut his throat?"

There was a short silence, during which Price thought he could hear the drops of sweat trickling down his forehead. Then Burr said, without rancor,

"I guess you're right. We'd better take him to the Chief."

"All right," said Twist. He crouched down and began unwrapping the bolo ropes. Price said, "Thanks." It seemed a very small word, and inadequate. Twist grunted.

"If you prove out to be a collaborator," he said, "you'll wish I'd let you die an easy death."

"I'm not," said Price. His brain had been working with abnormal speed. "This is an - - - an *old* plane. The papers are still in it. It's been kept hidden, except - - -" He groped desperately for explanations. "It's a tradition in my family to fly. We're taught, father to son."

That was true enough. Price's

father had taken to the air in World War I, and for years afterward had run a flying service. The rest of it he had to play by ear, and God help him if he guessed wrong.

TWIST HELPED him to his feet. "Now," he said to the others, "I want to know what about that plane."

"Get it under cover," Burr said. "Hide it."

"We might do that," Twist said. "And the first flying-eye that happened along would find it. They do more than see, you know. They smell, too. They smell metal, if it's much bigger than a knife." He held out the stone-weighted ropes and shook them. "That's why we use these when we hunt in the Belt. Remember?"

"Now, there's no call to be jeering, Twist," said Burr. "If you got a better idea, we'll listen to it."

"Fly it out," said Twist sharply. "How else are we going to get it to the Chief? On our backs? Cut up and packed on the horses? No." He turned to the man who had taken Price's pistol. "Give me that, Larkin. And you, Harper, hand that rifle to Burr. Larkin, you're in charge of the party. Get the beef back to the camp, and as soon as you've smoked it load up and head home. Keep an eye

out for trouble - - - this is liable to poke up the Citadel like you'd poke a beehive."

Larkin, a short powerful man with a curly poll like a certain type of bull Price had once seen, asked in a mild high voice, "Where are you and Burr going?"

Twist pointed a thumb skyward. "Up there," he said, and his eyes shone with excitement. He looked at Burr and grinned.

Burr was scared. It showed in his eyes, in the way his mouth tightened. But he wouldn't say so. Instead he reached out and grabbed Price by the shirt and shook him fiercely.

"There'll be a gun at your head every minute, and don't you forget. You do anything wrong, and you're dead."

Price forebore to explain what would happen to Burr and Twist if they shot him in mid-air. He only nodded and said,

"Don't worry. I'm as anxious to get to your Chief as you are." He took a deep breath and plunged. "That's what I came for."

Burr said, "You're a long way out of your way."

"This is new country to me. I got lost."

You don't know how lost. You don't know how alone.

"Come on," said Twist. "There's been too much yattering already."

He led the way back to the edge of the trees. Price and Burr followed him. The others were already working on the carcass. Presently they were hidden from sight. At the verge of the prairies the three men stopped and examined the visible world before they left cover. Price looked around and did not see anything and was ready to go on. Burr and Twist not only looked at earth and sky, they sniffed the wind and seemed to feel the quality of the air, like animals.

Twist gave a kind of shrug and said, "Well, we're in it now, whole hog." He began to run through the long grass toward the plane. Burr went fleetly after him. Price, oppressed with many things of which physical exhaustion was the least, ran heavily behind them.

When they were within perhaps fifteen feet of the plane a glittering thing came over the tops of the trees and hesitated, making a couple of short spirals in the air. Then it centered over the plane and hung there, high above. It was a disc-shaped object maybe three feet across, with a big lens on its underside.

Twist and Burr had stopped. Price came panting up to them. They were looking up at the disc, and Price saw in their faces a wild mingling of rage and hate and the

despairing fear of men faced with an enemy that no amount of bravery or physical strength can prevail against.

"What is it?" he asked, and Twist said hoarsely,

"You must be from a long way west if you've never seen a flying-eye." His hands dropped to his sides. "Well. That's finished."

Burr began to curse at the thing. He looked as if he wanted to cry.

"What will it do?" asked Price.

"It'll hang there, right where it is, to guide the fliers from the Citadel. They can see us here where we stand, right now, in the Citadel." Burr's face was getting whiter by the second, like a man who has been stung by some venomous thing and realizes that in this present moment, between strides as it were, he must die. "They'll be starting. It's forbidden to come into the Belt. They'd kill us for that alone. But with the plane - - - God knows what they'll do."

"We can try and dodge them in the woods," said Twist, without hope. "Come on."

He started away, but Price said, "Can't we outfly it?"

"The flying-eye? It'll follow us like a hungry hound."

Some kind of television-scanner, Price thought, with a metal-detection unit and a signal relay to alert

the main control in the Citadel. And what was the Citadel, and who or what within it was now watching him as he stood, and preparing for his death?

He said, catching the sudden terror from the others, "Shoot it down."

"Shoot it?"

"Smash the lens. Then it can't see us. Here, give me the rifle."

Burr said, "You crazy? No gun will carry that far."

"What kind of guns have you got?" said Price. "Damn it, give me the rifle."

Twist said, "Let him have it."

PPRICE WAS a good shot. Not brilliant, just good. But today he was phenomenal. He blasted the lens and whatever insides there were behind it as fast as he could pump the cartridges into the chamber and fire them. He didn't miss once. And the disc flopped and slipped and crashed down sideways in the woods.

Price leaped for the plane. "Come on," he said.

The others were staring at him, with their jaws hanging open. "Did you see that? Did you see that *gun*?"

"Come on," Price yelled, "or I'm going without you!"

They tumbled in. Price started the motor, gunned it savagely,

and took off as though the devil was on his tail. One of the men, he didn't know which, yelled out in sheer fright, once. Then they were clear of the tree-tops and climbing fast.

Price looked over his shoulder, and once again he thought he saw that dark-metallic gleaming in the northeast.

"Which way?"

"Back across the river. And then," said Twist slowly, "I don't know. They've seen the plane. They'll come looking for it, and the first place they'll look is the Capitol, and after that the villages. They'll find it if it's anywhere near, and you can figure what they'll do to the people. They let us have our guns and our hunting knives, so we can kill game and even each other if we feel like it, but artillery, no. Explosives, no. And planes, no, no, no. Especially not planes. I don't suppose there's been one in the air for almost a century."

Twist shivered, his eyes shining, his hands gripping the seat.

"I'm glad I got to do this before I die. It's - - -" He fumbled for a word and gave up. "I can't say. But it makes you think what we were once, what we could have been today if it hadn't been for *them*." And he jerked his head back to indicate the direction of

the Citadel. "The star-spawn. The damned Star Lords."

Burr looked out the cabin window. "It's an awful long way down." Then he asked Price, "Why'd you say you came to find the Chief?"

A suspicious man, Price thought, and so is Twist. Careful, careful. But how can you be careful when you don't know what's going on in the world, and you don't dare ask?

Price said, "I came to give him the plane. I'm the last of my family. I wanted to join up with somebody, and - - - there aren't many in the desert." This, he thought, was a safe assumption. "Life's too hard. I wanted to come where there are trees and water."

It was a good story. He didn't know whether they believed it.

The Beechcraft left a fleeting shadow on the river and passed on. Twist peered anxiously into the sky behind.

"Can you go any faster?"

"I'm wide open now."

"Not fast enough. They come like lightning. *Whoom!*" Jets, thought Price, and began to look for a hole in the forest. Twist said, "And if they don't find us the first time, they'll send the flying-eyes."

"And they can smell metal," Price said. "So we've got to find

a place away from any town and not only out of sight from above but also screened from a magnetic detector. Say in a cave, under a rock ledge, or close to some heavy concentration of metal they're already used to. Can you think of any place?"

There was a total silence, and he realized that they were looking at him with cold and bitter eyes.

"How do you know so much?" asked Burr.

"Isn't it obvious?" said Price impatiently.

"Not to us. What's all this about magnetic detectors and screens - - - and where did you learn it if you're not working for the Citadel?"

Twist laid the muzzle of the revolver casually against his neck.

"I wouldn't shoot me now," said Price, and explained why, very quickly. "Besides, that's a hell of a way to act. Just because I happen to know a little elementary science - - - how else do you suppose the flying-eyes find metal? By some supernatural method?"

"Hm," said Twist, and withdrew the revolver. "Maybe he's right, Burr. After all, we're hunters. We never studied much into those things." Burr grunted desisively, but he sat still, apparently convinced that there was nothing

to be done about Price now. Twist thought hard for a minute. Then he said, "I know a place. There's a kind of a secret cave there, and room enough for you to land, I guess, figuring by what you took before."

He squinted out the window, confused by the differentness of how things looked from above. But finally he picked out a direction and told Price, "There."

After some low-level circling and searching Price found the place, a fairly flat stretch of bottomland in a little valley, beside an overhanging wall of granite. Twist's estimate of the room was hardly generous, but he made it, and taxied over bumpy sod as close as he could to the cave-mouth Twist pointed out. Then he sent the others to clear away some rocks and dangling creepers, and with a final heave and roar he managed to lurch into the cave itself. He cut the motor. He had about four hours' flying time left in the tanks.

He got out of the Beechcraft and dragged stones under the wheels to chock it. Then he helped Burr and Twist rearrange the hanging vines over the entrance.

A high shrill screaming in the sky gave them less than ten seconds' warning. They ducked back under the overhanging ledge and

peered motionless from under it. And Price saw close above him, skimming the rolling land like an eager hawk, an ovoid craft that was not like any jet he had ever seen, wingless, leaving no trail, but tearing with a mighty shriek of power through the sky.

CHAPTER IV

TRAPPED in a strange dream, Price looked down from the forested ridge into a shallow green valley. Burr pointed and said,

"There it is. The Capitol of the Missouriis."

He said it with pride. He and Twist had talked of this place, in the two days since they had hidden the plane and headed north. And they had talked of it proudly. Their home, the city of their people, the focus of a shadowy government that ruled the forest-lands which once had been two great states.

Price looked at it, and he felt pity. Pity, and a wrenching regret for what the world had once been, and what it had become during the lost years.

In the valley, straddling a clear little river, lay a half-dozen streets of wooden houses and workshops and smithies. The buildings were neat enough, of massive squared timbers. But the streets were un-

paved and dusty, and their only traffic was loaded wagons from the surrounding tilled lands, and pack-horse trains from the forest trails, and men, women, children in drab leather and wool. A faint sound of creaking axles drifted up through the drowsy afternoon air.

"The Capitol of the Missouri," Price thought. "And oh God, why did it have to happen to our world?"

He had listened, on the way here, to everything Burr and Twist said. Bit by bit, the jigsaw fragments of information had fallen into place, and a few casual questions had completed the apocalyptic picture.

It had happened long ago in the lost years, the years that Price had been hurled *through*. As near as he could make out the date had been 1979, sixty years ago.

That had been the year of doom. That had been the year when they had first come from outer space.

The Star Lords. The Vurna, as they called themselves. The accursed star-spawn, as men called them. Their tremendous cruisers had come out of the blue, had poised above the Earth, and then had struck.

Every city, every big town, every atomic power-plant, every arsenal, every important bridge, viaduct,

dam and factory. In one week of holocaust, they had been smashed by the remorseless cruisers that went round and round the planet. Millions died, that week. And the Star Lords' cruisers went away.

Quickly, they had returned. This time, not to destroy but to seize. What had been the fat, smiling lands of Illinois and Indiana, they had made their domain. In it, they built their Citadel.

The Citadel was a fortress, a city, above all, a base. The Star Lords contemptuously refrained from attacking the dazed Earth peoples who had been thrown back to near-primitive conditions. To the lords of the Citadel, Earth was only the site of an important base. Or so they said:

Was it any wonder, Price thought, that these men of the Missouri would kill anyone, anything, from the Citadel? Just hearing of it all had kindled his own rage. These mens' fathers had lived it, and they were still living it.

He looked down at the wooden town, as he and Burr and Twist went down a trail, and he thought, "Careful, though! They still think I *may* be from the Citadel - - - Watch every word!"

Two hours later, Price sat in a wooden-walled room in the biggest of the houses, facing the Chief

of the Missouri.

His name was Sawyer, and he was old. But he looked formidable as an old panther in his buckskins. His leathery face held deep pride, intelligence, and a brutal ruthlessness. Behind him stood the Chiefs of the Indianas and of the Illinois, those scattered peoples on whose lands the Citadel now stood.

SAWYER listened without a word to Price's story, and all the time Price told it he thought how thin and far-fetched it sounded. But, looking at these faces, he knew he could never convince them of the truth.

"Two days ago," said Sawyer finally, "the Vurna were here. They were almighty hot and bothered. They were looking for a plane. I never saw a plane in my life, and I said so."

He paused, his swarthy, wrinkled face brooding, and no one, least of all Price, dared speak.

He went on. "Since then, the sky's been lousy with their flying-eyes, hunting and hunting. You must have seen them."

Burr took that as an opening. "We did. We kept ducking them, all the way."

Sawyer looked out the doorway at the dusty, sunlit street and then back again to Price and he said

with sudden blazing fierceness,

"You tell me you heard of us Missouri way out in your mountains, that you wanted to bring your plane to us - - - why?"

Price floundered. "Why, I wanted to help you - - -"

"To help us do what?" A garnet light was in the old man's eyes now. "What did you hear we were doing that you wanted to help on?"

Price sensed from the other's fierceness that he was in imminent danger, that something he had said had deepened suspicion.

He almost welcomed the interruption that saved him from answering now, though it was a sound that raised the short hairs on his neck.

The sound of shrieking power across the sky, the sound of the sky-hunters from the Citadel . . .

"That's the damned star-spawn coming down here again!" said one of the men behind Sawyer.

The old man got to his feet with amazing alacrity. He rapped an order to Twist and Burr, pointing to Price.

"Take him upstairs. If he makes a peep, cut his throat - - - but do it quiet."

Little more than a minute later, Price was in a hot, dusty little room. It had gun-slots in its heavy wooden shutters, and they let level

bars of golden light into the room.

He heard the whine of the flier, coming down fast. He went to the gun-slot.

"No," said Burr.

Price turned and looked at him. He kept his voice low. "The hell with you," he said. "You can stand behind me with your knife. I'm not going to yell. But I'm going to see."

He heard Burr and Twist come up close behind him, as he peered out the wide slot.

Out in the green square, a white craft marked with a curious insignie was making a vertical landing. He thought it was a type of aerodyne. He had never seen one in flight, back in that strangely far-off and quickly-fading time from which he had come, but he had seen sketches and a working model. This seemed to be a refinement of the same principle, faster than a jet and maneuverable as a toy balloon. His hands itched to fly it.

He saw the insignie on its side - - - a golden sunburst with what looked like a many-colored, many-faceted globe at its heart. He did not know what it signified but he knew what it was. The mark of the Star Lords, of the Vurna. And even as he looked, four of them came out of the craft.

They came along the street to

where Sawyer and the other Chiefs and a little crowd of leather-clad men silently waited. No one had a gun, no one made a motion. Yet that dusty street was electric with a hatred so deep and strong and quivering that it made Price shiver.

Yet the four Vurna came straight on. The Star Lords, they from unguessable spaces who had smashed Earth like a child's toy, to make it their footstool. Price pressed closer to the gun-slot. He wanted to see them very clearly indeed.

Especially one of them.

THE STAR LORDS were tall and well-formed, and they looked much like Earthmen except that they wore tight-fitting garments of various colors, but all cut to the same pattern. Price guessed that they were uniforms, with the colors indicating rank or branch. The other chief difference was the coloring of the Star Lords themselves. They were bronzed as though by radiations fiercer than any known on Earth, and their hair was silver. Not white, and not pallid, but a rich silver. The men - - - three of the four were men - - - wore their hair short.

The woman wore hers long, rippling onto her shoulders. It caught the sunset light and gleamed like hot metal. Her uniform was a

deep crimson, duskier than flame, molding her long thighs and her high, just-full-enough breasts.

Sawyer was speaking to them now, his voice rolling out harshly in the silence. "If you're still hunting for that plane, my answer's the same. I've never seen one."

One of the Vurna men, who seemed to have the authority, stepped a pace in front of the other two men and the woman.

The woman had raised her head and was looking restlessly at the blank or shuttered windows of the timber houses. Price felt uneasily that she knew he was there and was looking at him through the gun-slot. But that, of course, was ridiculous.

"Sawyer, listen to me," said the man of the Vurna. He spoke clear but stilted English, with strong tones of some alien tongue in its unaccustomed rhythms. He wore a black uniform with a small gold sunburst at the collar. It was impossible to guess his age. And while he kept his voice quiet and his manner calm, there was anger in him.

There was anger in Price too, a deep rage growing in him as he looked at the men and the woman who stood here like conquerors on the planet they had ruined, indifferent to the hatred they faced.

"Here is no time and no place

for stubborn obstructions," the Vurna man was saying. "Things move quickly now. We have an enemy before us so vast and powerful that we dare not have one also at our backs, no matter how weak. I ask you to believe that, Sawyer. I ask you to understand that if we Vurna fall, you perish - - -" he made a sudden chopping gesture of the hand "- - utterly."

"I ask *you*," said Sawyer, "to look at my white hairs, and not insult them by talking to me like I was a child." His voice was strong, and anything but servile. "You can forget that old tale of the 'enemy'. I laughed at it when I was in my cradle. There's been only one enemy seen on this Earth, and that was you."

The crowd muttered, *Yes*.

"Your starships," Sawyer said, "smashed our cities and broke our nation and our world down to where it is. My own father saw it happen. One day a free world, the next - - - nothing. So fast there was hardly even a blow struck back. You did it."

The crowd muttered louder. Price felt Burr and Twist move beside him, breathing in the dark. Breathing hate.

"Don't come to me, an old man," Sawyer said, "and ask me to believe foolishness. As for the plane you say you saw, I tell you again

I haven't got it. And if I did have I wouldn't give it up to you, nor the man either. And you know it, Arrin."

The woman spoke briefly in her own language to Arrin, her tone and gesture seeming to say that they were wasting their time. Her voice was low and clear, as beautiful as the rest of her, but there was an impatient contempt in it that made Price bristle. The same thing was in her eyes when she looked at the old Chief of the Missouri.

Arrin shook his head. "Sawyer, I tell you once more, as you have been told for two generations, it was not the Vurna who destroyed your world, but the Ei. And I tell you that the Ei may even attack the Citadel; and that the fate of Earth would be decided in that battle, just as much as ours."

HIS VOICE rose suddenly in very human anger. "There is a war, you stubborn old man! A war vast - - - huge - - -" His arm swung in a wide circle that seemed to include the whole sunset sky. "Beyond your comprehension. Earth is nothing in it. A forward base, an observation post, that is all. But if we lose it, the Ei will sweep this part of the galaxy and you will regret it more than we. We can withdraw. You can-

not. You think you are cruelly treated now. You will weep to have us back!"

Sawyer remained unbending and unimpressed. Arrin sighed. His voice was quiet when he spoke again, but it had a ring of iron in it.

"I feel pity for your barbarism, until I remember that it continues because of your own proud stupidity. If ever you people of Earth had been willing to work with us - - - but let it be. And now I warn you, Sawyer."

He seemed to grow tall, grim, alien, the spokesman of inhuman forces. Price felt the skin grow cold along his back, and his belly knotted tight with the pricking of fear.

Arrin said, "If you are planning an attack upon the Citadel, forget it. We will slaughter you without mercy - - - not because we wish to, but because we must - - -"

Price caught the sharp intake of breath from the men beside him, and suddenly he understood many things he had not understood before.

Arrin was still speaking. "I will give you three days in which to deliver to me the plane and the man who flew it. If this is not done, we will be forced to use harsher measures. You understand?"

Sawyer said, in a tone as cold as Arrin's: "Is that all?"

"One more thing. Keep your hunters out of the Belt. It is a military zone, not a game preserve. Any more incursions will be regarded as a possible invasion. - - -"

Again Twist made a sharp, harsh sound in the darkness.

"- - - and we will make of it a blasted barren where not even a mouse or a beetle can survive. Consider that, Sawyer."

Arrin turned and walked away, the two men and the woman falling in behind him. Price watched the dark-crimson figure with the bright hair until he could see it no longer, and it dawned on him, as though the two things had a connection, that he was alive and living in this crazy world of Sawyers and Citadels and invaders from the stars, that these were his realities now and he had better wake up and grapple with them, or he would die. - - - and the death would be for real, and not any portion of a dream.

The aerodyne took off with a scream and a whistle. The crowd in the square began to break up. Sawyer turned and came into the house, the chiefs and the sub-chiefs following him.

Burr opened the shutters, and a welcome breath of air came into the stifling room, with a last gleam

of dying sunlight. Price looked at his companions. They were watching him, their eyes sharp and hostile.

"So that's why you were so frantic for the plane," he said. "You're planning an attack."

Burr said fiercely, "You should've let me kill him when I wanted to, Twist. And we should've left the plane where it was. Then they wouldn't have got suspicious."

"Maybe so," said Twist, and nodded. "Maybe so. On the other hand, if he is telling the truth, it might make all the difference."

There was a clattering on the loft stair, a man running up the steps. He came in and nodded to Burr and Twist.

"Sawyer says, bring the prisoner down - - - and hurry!"

CHAPTER V

SAWYER was standing in the middle of the room, talking rapidly to the chiefs of the Indians and the Illinois. The Indiana chief was old and fat and lazy, but the Chief of the Illinois was young, heavy-jowled and hard-eyed, the type that is born suspicious and never gets over it.

Sawyer turned to look at Price. He was intent and wire-drawn, a man poised on the brink of great happenings, at that crucial point

from which he may still choose whether to advance or retreat. Price bore his gaze steadily, and it was not easy to do, because the eyes of this tough old man seemed to be laying bare everything within him.

"But you can't take him *there*," said the Illinois Chief violently, looking also at Price. "The biggest secret on Earth, and if he's a spy - - -"

"If he's a spy," Sawyer interrupted harshly, "he'll never live to tell what he sees there."

He spoke to Price. "We're going on a journey. You're going too. And you two - - -" to Burr and Twist " - - - will guard him."

Burr and Twist nodded silently, and got their guns. The rifle and revolver had been handed over to Sawyer for safe hiding, and these guns were the clumsy, short-range bolt-action rifles of their own handcrafting.

Price said, "This is a hell of a way to treat a man who comes to you as a friend. I hate the Vurna as much as you do, for what they've done to Earth, and - - -"

Sawyer stopped him, saying ominously, "Save your words, you'll need them later. We've got a hard ride before morning. Let's go."

They all went out through a back door, except the old chief of

the Indianas who was not going. In the twilight outside, there were horses ready.

Sawyer and Oakes of the Illinois led off, and Price followed with Burr ahead of him and Twist behind him. One man rode ahead of the whole party with a lantern made to shine down but not up. The flying-eyes watched of night, too.

The six horses went all night at a steady pace, single file along a narrow track that dipped and wound through the forest. Price felt sure, from what he had overheard, that they were riding toward some great secret council. He guessed that his fate would be decided there, and probably the fate of the rest of mankind too.

There was nothing he could do about it till he got there. Meanwhile he thought about a long-thighed girl in crimson, with her bright hair swinging on her shoulders as she walked. He wished he could have had a closer look at her face. It had seemed beautiful, a clear forehead and a fine chin, but it was the eyes that told you what a person was, and he had not been able to study them. Could she be as heartless as all the Vurna were supposed to be?

He thought she must be. His hate of the conquering Star Lords

was rapidly growing. Before they had come, this dark, wild forest he was riding through had been rich farmland and pleasant towns. And when they had smashed all that, and built the Citadel to hold the ruined Earth, they had tried to make men willing captives by telling them that story of the Ei. It was the old Big Lie technique, but this lie had been too big for anyone to believe.

The woman might not be cruel. Arrin might be only a decent officer in a hard position. But all the same, they were aliens, despoilers of Earth, and he was an Earthman. These were his people - - - Sawyer, Burr, Twist, even the hateful and suspicious Oakes. These were the ones he would fight for, and with.

If they let him.

But they had to let him. He was the man with the plane. And as he rode wearily through the dark, he thought he knew the argument to use.

JUST BEFORE dawn, when the world was at its blackest and most silent, there was a challenge in the woods ahead, and the man with the lantern answered. Here and there among the trees other shielded lanterns flickered, widely scattered, and the woods were full of quiet sounds, the creak

of leather and jingle of bridle-chains, the soft thump of hoofs, the somnolent blowing of picketed horses. What men there were spoke in low voices.

Price's party dismounted and walked quietly among the picket lines. In a few minutes they reached the edge of the sheltering woods. The man with the lantern gave a low whistle, and another man materialized out of the blank dark ahead.

"This way," he said. "And watch your foot."

Now the man with the lantern followed him, the others coming after in Indian file. And Price began to see that the darkness was not as blank as he had thought. There were pale areas that gathered the faint starlight to themselves on flat, broken surfaces. He realized presently that these were walls, or had been once, and that he was walking on the shattered fragments of a city street. The feel of gritty concrete was unmistakable.

They went for quite a long way, apparently on some known path through the ruined city, and the sky began to pale before they reached their destination. Price could now make out the ghostly looming of building-fronts on both sides, high fronts with nothing behind them, so that the window-holes looked like a kind of elaborate

pierced-work. It was deathly still, so still that their own breathing and the stealthy padding of their feet woké furtive echoes from the stone.

Their guide stopped beside a small black hole no different from all the other small black holes that lurked under fallen masonry and flattened girders. "Down there," he said, and left them.

They climbed down a wide steel stairway, bent and twisted, but mostly intact. A great wave of warmth from close-packed and steaming humanity rolled up the stair to meet them, mingled with the smells of candle-grease, smoke, leather, sweat and the lingering overtones of horse.

Beyond the bottom of the stair there was a comparative blaze of light. Price knew they were in the basement of what had been a public building or department store, a space foreshortened by a mass of rubble and hanging steel where part of it had caved in. It was crammed with men, and their voices growled in that low enclosed space like the growling of a great animal too long caged.

There was a small group of men sitting somewhat apart, and Sawyer joined them, with Oakes. Chiefs, thought Price, and realized that this was a very big council indeed, and planned for long

ahead. Burr and Twist stood close on either side of him, but he forgot them for the moment, looking around in fascination at these his countrymen.

Forest-runners and hunters, like Burr and Twist, in greasy buckskins. Men from the lower river, from the swamp and bayou country, soft-spoken, hard-handed, dressed in coarse cotton dyed in bright Indian colors, yellow and red and green. Gaunt hill-farmers in hickory homespun, with their rifles between their hands. Boatmen down from the northern lakes, with a faint smell of fish about them, and long lean riders up from the southwest, leather-skinned and dangerous as rattlesnakes. Men from the black cornlands of Iowa, following their chief to talk of war. America, Price thought, basically unchanged, basically recognizable, but with all the fat sweated off it and all the luxuries stripped away, fined down to the ruggedness and strength of an earlier day, when men like this made a nation out of a wilderness.

He had a feeling they could do it again, in spite of the overwhelming power of the Star Lords. And if they couldn't, they would go down fighting like wildcats to the last.

The Chiefs were talking among themselves. Twist knew some of

them, leaders of the Iowas, the Michigans, the Arkansas, the Mississippi. Others they could guess at, Nebraska, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana. The two Missouri hunters were as excited as hounds before a hunt. Twist said there had never been a council this big in his memory. It would go on until the issue was decided, the men staying under cover in the ruins, the horses hidden in the surrounding woods.

PPRICE REALIZED suddenly that the assembled chiefs were all looking at him with an intense and largely hostile interest. Sawyer's news seemed to have upset them badly. The Chief of the Michigans, a huge black-bearded man with an enormous voice, belled suddenly for silence. In seconds the place was absolutely quiet, except for the shuffle of men closing in to see and hear a little better.

"Sawyer of the Missouris has something to tell you," shouted Michigan. "You listen hard. Because what he's got to say will make the difference whether we fight or hold our peace."

An astounded and angry roar broke out. Michigan jumped up on a makeshift stand and cursed them till they fell quiet.

"Do your howling afterward,"

he said. "This isn't just a whim on Sawyer's part. Something's happened. Shut up and listen."

Now they were alarmed and uneasy. They watched Sawyer climb the stand, their faces dark-bronze in the smoky light, their eyes glistening.

Sawyer said, "Twist - - - come up here."

Twist pushed his way to the stand and got on it. Burr moved closer to Price, his hand curled lightly around the haft of the knife in his belt.

Sawyer said, "Tell them."

Perfectly at ease, aware of his importance but not impressed by it, Twist told the story of the landing of Price's plane in the Forbidden Belt, and what had been done with both of them afterward. He told only the simple facts, scrupulously avoiding any attempt to incite his listeners for or against Price.

The simple facts were enough. They heard them, the men of the Great Lakes and the southern bayous, the plains riders and the hillmen and hunters and farmers, and their reactions were various and wonderful after the first shock of incredulous amazement. Twist had to stop to let the tumult die down, and when he could make himself heard again he said,

"Yes, it was just what I said,

a plane, and I flew in it. Not one of those whistling fliers, but a plane - - - so." He made a graphic pantomime with his hands and a remarkably accurate motor sound. "Now I guess that's all," he said, and stepped back.

Sawyer said, his words carrying clearly to the farthest man, "The Vurna have turned our lands upside down to find the plane. They haven't found it. Last night Arrin - - - " A furious snarl greeted that name, so apparently it was well known, " - - - Arrin gave me three days to surrender the plane and the man who flew it. I've brought him here, instead."

He held up his hands, to quell the rising voices. "Listen! I'm not finished yet. Arrin had some other things to say. He said, *If you are planning an attack on the Citadel, forget it. He said, We will slaughter you without mercy.*"

"Now," said Sawyer, "here is what we have to decide. Two things. Is this man Price a friend offering us a weapon, or a spy of the Vurna offering us death? And shall we fight, or let it go until another year? They're big questions, the biggest you'll ever have to answer in your lives. Don't come at them like hasty boys, all feeling and no sense. Come at them man-like, slow and careful."

Michigan rumbled, "Those are

good words. Heed them. And now let's have the man up here."

Burr gave Price a shove. "That's you."

Price shouldered forward through the pack and climbed the stand. As he did so Twist whispered in his ear, "You'd better make this good, boy. You won't get another chance."

His voice sounded friendly. Price was glad of it.

He stood on the platform and faced the chiefs and the representatives of the people.

Michigan said, "You tell your side of it. And speak up so everyone can hear."

Price spoke up, loud. But he said, "What's the good of that? I've told my side of it a dozen times already, and nobody believes me." He glared around the close-packed circle of men. "If I'd known you'd treat me like this, I'd have smashed the plane and left it for the coyotes."

"Just the same," said Michigan, "tell it again."

PPRICE TOLD IT. "I didn't know you were up to anything in particular; it just seemed obvious that a plane might be useful to you sometime, now or later, and it wasn't doing any good where it was." He had coached himself so carefully in the story that it was

beginning to seem like truth to him, gathering little embellishments and embroideries. "I brought guns, too, better than anything you have. And does anybody say, Thank you? The hell they do. They accuse me of being a spy for the Vurna."

A low animal grunt from the listeners. Their faces were as hard as flint.

Price shouted, "Would the Vurna be so anxious to get me back if they'd just sent me out as a spy? You heard Sawyer."

The Chief of the Louisianas said, "It would be a very smart trick for them to say so, for just that reason."

"And how is it," cried the Chief of the Arkansas, "that right away the minute you turn up, Arrin says that about attacking the Citadel? Doesn't that show they know something, and want to know more?"

"I should think that was obvious," said Price. "There hasn't been a plane in the air for two generations. All of a sudden there is one. Wouldn't the Vurna want to know where you got it, and whether you're building more like it? And do you suppose they'd figure that with a weapon like that you *wouldn't* be planning an attack of some kind on them?"

That was good sense, and they

thought it over, muttering among themselves. Price began to feel he was getting somewhere, and marshalled his words for the final argument. Then the Chief of the Oklahomas spoke up and said,

"My word would be to kill this man and hand his body, and the plane, to Arrin. That way we comply, but not to his advantage. Arrin knows no more than when he started, but we look innocent. We look as though we have no use for a plane. And when their backs are turned, we go ahead as we planned all along."

And that sounded better yet, even to Price. Especially since he knew better than any of them the relative usefulness of one Beechcraft as a weapon against the kind of forces the Star Lords had.

But he knew if they began to think of that he was finished. So he said, "Listen, you need that plane. It can reconnoiter, it can carry bombs - - -"

"Shut up," said someone fiercely. "Shut up, all of you. I hear something."

They quieted, and listened. Price could not hear anything but the tense mass breathing of the men. Then on the far side of the room first one man and then several began to dig like dogs after a rabbit into the heaped-up rubble.

"Here it is! Here it is - - -"

look!"

"What is it? Let's see."

"Ain't nothing but a little bitty box - - -"

"No! It's one of *their* contraptions! Let me through!"

A man in a linen shirt of green and yellow came bursting through the crowd, carrying something high over his head in one hand. He put it down on the stand, where it lay buzzing gently.

"Is that Vurna, or ain't it?"

Everyone drew back and away from it, as though fearing it might explode. It was a little metal box no bigger than a cigarette case, but Price knew what it was. He stepped forward and smashed it underfoot.

"You'd better clear out of here," he said. "Fast. That was a radio transmitter, broadcasting a steady guide signal to bring the Vurna right here."

There was one stunned moment of absolute silence, and then the place erupted into sound and movement. In the midst of it, in the heart of it, the Chief of the Michigans and the man in the linen shirt were possessed of the same idea. Crying "Spy!", they flung themselves at Price with their knives drawn.

REMEMBERING a trick or two the Army had taught

him, Price stepped inside the chief's rush, caught his wrist, and flung him into the other, who had been slowed by the necessity of climbing onto the stand. And Price yelled at them furiously,

"Are you crazy? I wasn't near that side of the room. I didn't bring it and plant it here."

Twist stepped between him and the two men, drawing his own knife. "He wasn't, and that's a fact. Besides - - -"

"Get out of my way!", roared Michigán.

Unexpectedly, Burr leaped up and pulled him back. "I was close to him as his own skin, every minute," he said. "He didn't move, and he didn't have that thing on him to drop if he'd wanted to."

"We searched him," said Twist, "days ago. Personal."

"Then you're traitors too," said Michigán, clinging to his single idea. He started to charge again, and now there were others swarming up onto the stand after him, screaming for Price's blood.

Sawyer moved like a big cat. Michigán stopped in mid-stride, with the point of Sawyer's knife touching his heart-ribs.

"These are my men," said Sawyer mildly. "I don't like having their loyalty called in question any more than they do."

Price leaned over and grabbed a

rifle out of somebody's hands. He clubbed it and began to swing, scattering men like ten-pins off the edge of the stand.

"Get out of here, you fools!" he howled at them. "Can't you get it through your thick skulls? The Vurna are coming. Get out!"

Numbers of them were already streaming up the stairs. Now more and more took up the cry, seeming to understand suddenly that someone's treachery had made this place a trap. Sawyer said to the Chief of the Michigans,

"Go on, take that hot head back to the Lake and cool it. Hurry up, before they get you."

Michigan snorted like an angry bull, but he turned and jumped down into the crowd. The man with the linen shirt was gone. Price was about to follow when he saw the muzzle of a rifle, upflung, glinting darkly in the lamplight. He shouted to Burr and Twist to look out, and then flung himself upon Sawyer. The shot was stunning in that closed space. He heard the slug go whistling overhead and then ricochet from the low concrete roof. Someone on the far side of the room cried out in rage and pain. "I thank you," said Sawyer, "and now let's get off this damned target."

They got off, the four of them sticking close together. Price did

not see Oakes, nor the man who had carried their lantern. Most of the lights were going out, knocked over and trampled. The dark surge of running men carried them to the stair and up and out into full, blinding day.

Somebody pointed to the sky and yelled, "There they come - - - the Vurna!"

CHAPTER VI

THEY WERE still a long way off but coming fast, whistling down the sky. Price could make out about a dozen bright dots flashing against the blue. Sawyer said,

"We'd better run for it!"

They fled, along the twisting path through the ruins. All around them, ahead and behind, other men were running, bolting away like wild creatures into the shadows of the broken walls.

And this was once their city, Price thought. A place of streets and homes and schools and churches, a good place, built with long hope and striving. What right did the Vurna have to break it?

He looked up at the fliers. They were larger now, moving swiftly above ragged crenellations that showed stark white in the hot summer sun. He looked down, and there was desolation. He ran in it,

leaping and stumbling over the bones of a city, driven like the rest.

Sawyer swept a lean arm out in a commanding gesture. "Take cover!"

They dodged into the crevices of an unidentifiable mass half grown with creepers and rank grass. The old bricks tottered and threatened to fall as they pressed past them. They lay panting and listened to the Vurna fliers go over.

"They've broken formation," Price said. He had listened to hostile craft before. "Spread out. They'll sweep back and forth - - -"

A section of wall collapsed, close by them, with a rumble and a great puff of white dust. They leaped back, and Sawyer said, "That makes a beacon for them. Well, come on."

They ran out, crouching low, scurrying along the ravaged streets where their grandfathers had walked in peace. Price could see the green woods in the distance, but the air was full of the power-scream of the searching aerodynes, and he did not think that they would make it. He was right.

One of the ships shot down to hover three feet off the ground ahead of them, and another dropped behind. Sawyer turned to the right. A third ship came down. He turned to the left. A fourth one blocked

him. He stopped where he was, too proud to look farther for escape where he knew there was none. Burr and Twist stood with him. All three lifted their rifles and prepared to die.

Price had nothing in his hands. The bright hovering ships mocked him, their noise deafened him, the wind of their air-blasts tore at him with vicious force. He hated them. He had never hated anything so much in his life, not even the enemy he had fought in Korea. He groped among the rubbish around his feet, half-blinded by dust and a red haze that was of his own making.

A very loud metallic voice spoke to them from one of the ships. "Put down your weapons and stand together with your hands high. You will not be harmed." Sawyer laughed. He hunched the rifle to his shoulder and fired. The slug went *splat!* on the skin of the aerodyne, and dropped.

"Put down your weapons and stand together. We will count six. At that time we will fire. Six. Five. Four."

Sawyer laid his rifle into the dust at his feet and straightened, folding his arms. Twist and Burr did the same. Tears stood in Burr's eyes, tears of outraged anger.

And this was their city, Price thought. My city. Ours.

Men began now to jump out of the hovering aerodynes, Vurna with cropped silvery hair. They wore uniforms of dark green. This was not their city, it was not their world. Price's fingers closed over the end of an iron bar in the rubbish.

He sprang forward, holding the iron bar.

A BEAM of cold light, hardly visible in the sunshine, flashed out from the nearest ship. Price was running, and then he was not running, he was face down on the ground with the white dust in his hair. The bar spun out of his hand and fell with a faint clatter.

The Vurna closed in. They escorted Sawyer and Burr and Twist each into one of the ships. Two of the green-clad soldiers bent and picked up Price and carried him to the fourth. They clambered in, and the aerodynes rose whistling into the air.

Over the place from which the Earthmen had fled, roughly in the center of the city, several of the ships were gathered. They circled slowly, but nothing moved in the streets. At length all but one of them rose up, and that one made brief lightnings flicker from its underbelly. Down below a volcano erupted, thundered, burned,

and died, sinking into ash and dust. That gathering-place would not be used again, and any store of arms or powder concealed in it would not be used either.

The ships of the Vurna raced away toward the east. Behind them the forest was full of men and horses, moving out.

After a while a remote and disoriented consciousness returned to Price. He opened his eyes and saw a blur of red and silver and flesh tones. A little later he opened them again, and the blur had become a woman with silver hair and a uniform of dark crimson.

The woman.

She said, "You will be normal again in an hour or so. The shock-ray does no permanent damage."

He looked at her, not caring very much about how he would feel an hour from now. He felt pleasantly languid, forgetful of his cares. Her eyes were a curious color, not like Earth eyes at all. They were like little bits of sky and moon glow and the far-off fires of stars, cool and strange and lovely. He said,

"They're not cruel, after all."

"What are you talking about?"

"Your eyes. They're beautiful. Like you."

A faint flush touched her cheeks. But she only said, "How are you called?"

He told her, and she wrote it down. He saw now that she held a kind of clipboard on her knee. Just beyond her was a cabin window. Streamers of torn cloud whirled by it so fast that he was startled. Then other things began to impinge on his senses, air-scream, a smooth rush of speed. He sat up.

The man beside the pilot turned abruptly, his hand reaching for a weapon at his belt. The woman spoke to him in her own tongue, and then said to Price,

"We do not wish to stun you again. You will not make it necessary."

"No," said Price. He leaned forward, staring in fascination at the controls of the aerodyne, watching the pilot's movements.

"You are interested? As a pilot?"

"Yes." The controls seemed surprisingly simple. These controlled the force of the air-flow, those the angle of the blast - - - "It's so much more maneuverable than a jet, and so much more powerful than any 'copter. I - - -"

He shut his mouth, abruptly conscious that he had made a bad slip. But the woman did not seem to have noticed it. He asked her hastily, changing the subject, "What's your name?"

"Linna," she said. "Of Vrain

Four. That's the planet of a star you never heard of, in the Hercules Cluster. I have some other identifying words, a patronym much like yours and a set of code-numbers such as have been used on this world also."

"You seem to know a lot about us, for a girl from - - uh - - Vrain Four."

"That's my business. I'm a specialist in Earth cultures. Section 7-Y, Social Technics. Where is your home?"

She was friendly, almost too much so. Price was wary now, his mind shaking off the lethargy of the shock.

"Nevada."

She wrote on the clipboard, some kind of shorthand. "I have not been that far west. What is Nevada like?"

HE TOLD HER, leaving out any mention of cities. The aerodyne raced forward, and he watched the controls avidly. So simple. So beautifully, functionally simple. His fingers twitched with eagerness.

"You have flown a great deal?"

"My father taught me." Careful, Price thought. These people are probably no brighter or shrewder than my own, but they're better able to investigate and check on things. "Tell me, what's it like on

Vrain Four?"

"We eat and sleep, make love and die," she said, "very much like you. The sky is very beautiful at night. The stars are close and burning, not cold and far-away like yours." She paused.

"Where did your father learn to fly?"

"From his father. It's a family tradition."

"And the plane had belonged to your family since the Ei destroyed the atomic cultures of your Earth-year 1979?"

"Since the *Vurna* destroyed it - - - yes."

She did not argue the point. "How old was the plane then?"

Sneaky little question, quietly asked. What was she driving at? Price began to feel that he was in a trap, but he could not quite see the shape of it. Then, before he was forced into an answer that might very well be the wrong one, he saw something that gave him the perfect excuse to ignore it.

The thing he saw was a starship.

He had never seen a starship before in his life, but he knew this could not be anything else. He judged that they must be back across the river now and well within the Forbidden Belt. The ship stood like a tower of white metal, enormous, slim, delicate, a thing of slumbering power that caught

the throat with awe and wonder. There were no trees anywhere near it, and the earth underneath was fused and hardened to a substance more durable than iron or concrete.

Linna said, "That is one reason we do not want men in the Belt. There is danger of being caught in a take-off or a landing."

The aerodyne flashed past; and Price looked back as long as he could at the dwindling shape, splendid but curiously lonely in the middle of nowhere.

"I would have thought you'd have a port, close in. By the Citadel, I mean."

Linna shook her head. "Dispersal is much safer. That is why the Belt is so wide. We have a number of ships."

The man beside the pilot spoke, and Linna touched Price's shoulder, pointing ahead. "In a minute you will see the Citadel."

What he saw first was that iron blinking in the low air that he had seen from the plane. It grew with fantastic speed, taking shape, acquiring height and substance. Price had been prepared for something tremendous. In spite of that, he was wide-eyed and astonished as any tribesman.

The Citadel rose from a level barren, swept clear of every living thing. It was round, a vast flat-

topped tower stunning in its stark hugeness. It did not fit on Earth at all. This monstrous, man-made metal mountain belonged to another world.

Around it as far as he could see were launching-pads for a species of missile that looked more deadly than any of the ICBM'S they had been dreaming up in his own day. Atop the Citadel, on the vast plain of metal that was its roof, there were installations that looked like radar, and others he could only guess at - - - something in the radio-telescope line, perhaps, with elaborate grids. Set around the perimeter of the roof, and looking ominously out across the Belt, were hooded emplacements that made Price think of Arrin's warning: We will make of the Belt a blasted barren, where not even a beetle can survive . . .

"You see how helpless," Linna said, quietly echoing his own thoughts. "Men with knives and little guns - - - they would be throwing their lives away."

THE OLD ANGER came back to Price, and he said sullenly. "The Siegfried Line was supposed to be impregnable, too."

But he knew she was right, and he looked down with a sinking heart as the aerodyne swept in for a landing on the roof. How could

Earthmen ever hope to throw this mighty power from their backs?

He stepped down to the iron deck, still a little slow and shaky when he moved. Other aerodynes were dropping down one by one. He looked around for Sawyer and Burr and Twist, but he did not see them. Vurna guards fell in on either side and Linna said,

"I think your friends have already landed, and are with Arrin below. Come on."

The invitation was pure rhetoric. He had no choice. The guard took him toward a circle painted bright red for the guidance of pilots, and about eight feet across. He asked, "Is Arrin the big boss?"

"The Supreme Commander of this base. You see how important you are to us. - - you and your plane?"

They stood on the red circle, and it dropped with them smoothly down a gleaming metal shaft. It did not drop too far. They stepped from it into a corridor, brightly lighted by tubes sunk into the low ceiling. There were many doors on either side, and Vurna in uniforms of various colors passed back and forth.

The office of the Supreme Commander was as austere and functional as everything else Price had seen: Narrow windows with flush shutters of steel looked out across

the sunlit Belt. One wall was a maze of screens and dials, communicator devices, and another had rows of tube-mouths with vari-colored tabs. Arrin stood facing Sawyer, with Burr and Twist behind their chief. There were several guards. As Price came in with Linna, Sawyer was saying,

"I told you I wouldn't give the man up, nor the planè. As for the meeting, your paid traitor can tell you all about it. And now you can go ahead and kill me."

Arrin said impatiently, "It isn't your life I want from you, but only a little cooperation." He looked up at Price, his eyes narrowing. "This is the man?"

Linna spoke to him in the Vurna tongue. A look of surprise showed for an instant on Arrin's face. He questioned Linna. Sawyer, meantime, said to Price,

"We thought they'd killed you."

Price shook his head. He was worried about what Linna was saying to the Commander. Once more he had the feeling of a trap he could not see.

Arrin nodded curtly, and gave some order to Price's guards. Linna said in English, "You are to come with me."

Price said, "I'd rather stay with my friends."

"Perhaps later."

There was no use arguing. Price

went where he was told. On another and much lower level, which might have been underground for all he knew, he was ushered into a small, neat, impersonal cubicle with no window and with a lock on the outside of the door. Obviously, a cell.

Linna said, "I would like your shirt, please."

He stared at her. "What?"

"Give me your shirt."

Again there was no use arguing with her. He took it off and handed it to her.

"Food and drink will be provided," she said. "You will be quite comfortable."

She went away, with the guards. Securely locked in the cubicle, Price sat and brooded. Food and water came, packaged, through a slot device in the wall. He ate and drank, and brooded again.

Finally, Linna came back. She handed him his shirt and watched him soberly while he put it on. And then she dropped her bomb.

"You have been lying to me," she said quietly. "I know *now* where you came from."

CHAPTER VII

PRICE STOOD stone still, meeting her gaze. But his thoughts were racing like startled deer. How could even the super-sci-

tific Vurna have guessed his incredible origin? It was a freak, a fluke that wouldn't happen once in a million years . . .

Linna was saying, "Take your plane. Obsolete in model as it was, it would require extensive machine shops to fabricate it. And your clothing. Your shirt is of synthetic fabric, and so is the dye. It was woven on machines. And these are new - - - not relics preserved for a century."

Price managed to keep his voice level as he said, "So - - -"

"So," Linna said, "there is somewhere a hidden community big enough to keep the old technologies of your people alive. A community we've known nothing about."

She regarded him in stern triumph, as though she had gained a victory.

Price sat down on the narrow bed. He had an hysterical desire to laugh, but he did not do that. Instead, he turned his head away from Linna as though to hide his dismay, but actually he was trembling with a sudden realization.

She had just given him his chance, if he kept his head and played it right. In her wholly mistaken, if quite natural, deduction of his origin, she had given him a chance for escape.

She misread his silence. "Fur-

ther lies will not do you any good." Astonishingly, there was pity in her voice. "I see now what you intended. You wished to share your community's knowledge with other tribes, to give them new weapons in their fight against us. And now you hope still to keep your secret, so someone else may succeed where you failed. Believe me, Price, I understand - - -"

"Do you?" he said savagely.

"Yes," she said, her voice hardening. "And I understand better than you what would have happened to your army if they had attacked, armed with pitiful little planes like yours and only slightly more powerful rifles." She spoke swiftly to the guard outside, and then snapped at Price, "Come, I want to show you something."

She led Price out between the green-clad guards. They went down the echoing corridor of the cell-block, and into a lift that took them swooping up a long way, and then into another corridor and eventually into a medium-sized room circular in shape, completely surrounded by a double row of screens. The lower screens gave a fixed view of the terrain within eyeshot of the Citadel itself. The upper screens reflected a roving, ever-shifting view of the remoter Belt, the woods and prair-

ies, herds of wild cattle grazing, deer bounding with their white flags up, the lonely starships waiting on their isolated fields. Four men in uniforms of dull gold watched the screens and checked a series of clicking recorders. Beneath each screen was a battery of studs.

"You see how much chance you would have of approaching unseen? And do you see what would happen to an army? One man here, touching those firing studs, and the whole Belt would become in seconds like the barren outside the walls. Nothing would be left. Nothing."

In Linna's eyes now there was the same impatient contempt for his stupidity that he had seen there before, when Arrin had talked to Sawyer in the square.

"And this is how you would help them - - - to their destruction."

If the situation had been what she imagined it to be, that would have been the truth. Price allowed a sullen doubtfulness to show in his face. But he said,

"What about your starships? You wouldn't destroy them."

"They can be flown on autopilot at a moment's notice, out of harm's way. Oh, for heaven's sake, Price, can't you see that I'm trying to help you? I don't want your

people slaughtered. We, the Vurna, don't want them slaughtered. But if you persist in battering your stubborn heads - - -"

"All right, all right," he said crossly. "You've got the weight and weapons. Let's get out of here. It makes me sick to think how helpless we are."

THEY WENT outside into the corridor again. At its end there was a window, and Price stood by it, looking out. He pretended to be sunk in bitter reflection, but his brain was spinning furiously, trying to see all ways at once. He said,

"If I show you where our hidden colony is, you'll only smash it up. There's a lot there that isn't weapons, things that could help build up a civilization again. Why should I show you?"

"To keep some other idiot from trying to do what you have done. We won't destroy anything that's useful, only control it as to the production of weapons." She sighed, and added, "I hate to put it this way, Price, but if you don't show me willingly it will have to be another way, and I don't want that."

There was a real ring of sincerity in her voice. Price grumbled around a bit, permitting himself to be beaten.

"All right," he said at last. "I

guess there's nothing for it. I'll show you."

"Good. I'll arrange for a flier
- - -"

Her voice was drowned out by a sudden hooting of sirens all through the Citadel. For a moment no one moved. Linna's face became drained of all color. The guards stiffened, staring in a kind of wonder. The steel shutter of the window clanged to with a ringing snap, and Price could feel in that vast building a stirring and buzzing as of a menaced hive.

"What is it?" he asked, his feeling of triumph beginning to slip away almost before he had had time to enjoy it.

Linna's voice was quite steady when she answered. "Possibly nothing. You must return to your cell now. We'll discuss the trip later."

The sirens stopped.

The guards hustled Price along urgently now, as though they had more important things to attend to. The Vurna were shifting rapidly from places to other places, but all in good order. Only their faces were tense and they did not talk except to pass an order or ask for one. It was obvious that there was an alarm, that the Citadel was taking up battle stations, and that everyone was, if not afraid, at least severely uneasy. Price began

to be uneasy too. Nevertheless, he noted the symbol that identified the floor, and studied the life-controls as he was dropped down to the prison level again.

In perfect silence they stepped from the lift and started down the corridor toward Price's cell. Then the sirens screeched again, but on a different note. Linna gave a little sigh. Without thinking about it he put his arm around her.

"All clear?"

"Yes. What a relief. I'm technically a soldier, but I'm afraid a technicality is all it is. I - - - shh! Listen."

A clear metallic voice had begun to speak over some communicator system that apparently reached every corner of the Citadel. Linna drew away from him without seeming to notice his familiarity, listening intently. The guards listened too, and so did three or four other Vurna visible in the corridor. Price could understand nothing, except that the word "Ei" occurred several times. The Vurna's favorite bogeyman. He wondered if the Vurna powers-that-were used it to hoodwink their own people, too. It would explain Linna's sincerity, Arrin's honest annoyance, if they themselves believed in a menace called the Ei.

The window at the end of the corridor had reappeared as the safe-

ty shutter slid back. Through it, tantalizingly small and far away, Price watched the landing of a starship, and it was disappointingly remote and unreal as a scene done with models for an old film.

Until he felt the mighty fabric of the Citadel, man-made mountain of steel and iron, quiver underneath him with the shock-wave of that landing. Then he knew.

The voice stopped speaking. There was a moment of dead quiet, as though what the voice had said was more momentous than the alarm. Linna's face was pale again, and the guards looked both excited and apprehensive. One of them spoke to Linna, and she shook her head, apparently giving him a reassuring answer.

Price said irritably, "Can you tell me what's going on?"

"There was a skirmish," she said, "out there. That's what the alarm was, to tell us there was fighting going on, but of course it was already over. There was only one Ei ship, a scout."

"Oh," said Price, and almost smiled. Scramble them once in a while, keep them on their toes. Remind them of the menace. It was a simple technique. Earthmen had evolved it quite early.

People were talking now. He could hear their voices echoing down the metal halls, excited, fearful.

Several went to the window to crane their necks at the distant starship. And then the metallic voice began to speak again, very crisp and clipped.

"Maximum security," Linna said. "All corridors cleared, all doors and safety bulkheads locked. All off-duty personnel in quarters. Go in, Price." She pointed to his cell door. "I have to hurry."

The corridor was clearing like magic. Price hung obstinately in the doorway. "What now?"

"They captured the scout. They're bringing in two of the Ei - - alive."

One of the guards shoved him in, and the door slammed shut on its magnetic lock.

Price lay down on the bunk. So they had captured a scout, and they were bringing in two Ei, alive. And everybody in the Citadel was ordered behind locked doors. Handy. Very. He was beginning to feel less hostility toward at least some of the Vurna. They were not so hard-headed and skeptical as the Earthmen. They believed, and the belief was keeping them here to man an outpost fort when they would doubtless much rather return home.

He found himself unaccountably pleased that he had an excuse to stop hating Linna.

He thought about the plan he

had in mind until he went to sleep.

IT WAS difficult, in that windowless and practically soundproof place, to judge the passage of time. To Price it seemed like centuries. He slept, and woke, and ate, and paced around, and fretted between hope and a despairing certainty that Linna had forgotten all about him. He slept again, and was awakened from that sleep by the deep shuddering of the Citadel as a starship either landed or took off. He lay drowsily wondering what it was like to fly one of those mighty craft, traitorously wishing he was a Vurna so he might have a chance to find out, and dreaming of space and stars and foreign worlds.

The Citadel shook again, and yet again, and Price came wide awake. He counted twenty-one, and there was no way of knowing how many landings or take-offs had occurred before he woke, or too far out in the Belt to be noticed here.

Certainly some large movement was underway. He took to pacing again, in a sweat of worry over what this meant, not to the Vurna, but to him.

After what seemed an eternity the door opened and Linna stood there, looking pale and grave.

There were no guards with her. She was alone.

"The flier is waiting, Price," she said. "Let's go."

He joined her. And now he saw that the aspect of the corridor had changed. A sliding bulkhead had closed off part of it behind a wall of iron.

"What's that for?" he asked.

"Our - - prisoners," said Linna, as though the word stuck to her tongue. "Come on."

She seemed in a great hurry to get away from that bulkhead. Price said, "What's the matter, aren't they human, or something?"

She gave him a look. "You still think it's all a great joke."

"I didn't say that."

"You mean it, though. You still believe the Ei are something we made up to shift the blame from ourselves. Probably you believe we are staging this whole matter to impress you and your chief, so that you will go back and assure your tribesmen it is all true."

This was so uncomfortably close to what Price was thinking that he said involuntarily, "You're entirely too smart for such a pretty girl."

"Sometimes I think," she said between her teeth, "that there is no hope for you people, no hope at all."

Price nodded toward the bulk-

head. "The solution is simple enough, isn't it? Let me see them. Then I'll have to believe you."

"Simple enough," said Linna, echoing his words. "Do you think *you* could stand against them? We have fought them for generations, we have knowledge and experience, and even for us, with all our safeguards, it is difficult. Only a few, like Arrin, would attempt it, and I saw him this morning. He looks like a ghost."

"And that's why you've never let any Earthmen see an Ei - - - because they're too dangerous."

"No. It's more simple than that. We have had none to show. These are the first Ei we have captured for a century, at least in this sector of the galaxy. I have never seen one, either. And I don't want to."

She strode off, away from the iron wall across the corridor. Price shrugged and followed her.

"Where are my friends?"

"They're here," she said, indicating the row of doors they were passing. "Quite safe - - - or as safe as any of us. They'll remain here until - - -" She hesitated, and Price realized for the first time that she was deeply, genuinely afraid. "Until we see what happens," she finished.

"After that, what?"

"If they're still alive, and we're

still alive, and there's still a world, they'll go free, and perhaps they'll be wiser men than they are now."

She would not say any more.

The lift swept them up to the roof. It was late afternoon, intensely hot, with storm-clouds banking in the west. The roof area seemed almost deserted, and only one flier was visible. Linna motioned him into it and climbed in herself. She spoke to the pilot, and he took off immediately. There was no co-pilot. Only Price, and Linna, and one man. Price felt a secret surge of assurance, of power, like when you're riding a streak of luck and the dice can't fall any way but right. He sat quietly, looking out the cabin port.

He saw almost at once that the starships were gone. The whole Vurna fleet must have taken off, shaking the Citadel with their leaving. Probably most of the men had gone with it. The deserted appearance of the Citadel, the lack of guards, the lack of a co-pilot, all pointed to a skeleton force. *If we're still alive, and there's still a world*, Linna had said. Battle, somewhere out in the far reaches of space? Perhaps. Or maneuvers, or a show of force connected with some galactic game he would probably never know about. It was not really important. What was import-

ant was the fact that for the present the defenses of the Citadel were weaker, much weaker.

He sat looking out the port and covertly watching the pilot's hands on the controls. Linna had some kind of a side-arm strapped around her slender waist. Probably a shocker. The pilot had one, too. He considered the problem, and the woods and prairies rolled back underneath.

Linna spoke suddenly, out of a long and somber silence.

"This mission is more important than ever now, Price, or I wouldn't have been allowed to divert even one man from our defences. I beg you, for the sake of your own people, to play fair with me. If there's either help or hindrance in our rear, we must know it. The Ei - -"

Now said something in Price's mind. He did not stop to question it. When you're riding a hot streak, let it ride. Never stop to question.

He rose and hit Linna on the point of her pretty chin.

CHAPTER VIII

SHE DROPPED in her seat without a sound. Price clawed for the weapon she had at her waist. But the abrupt cessation of her voice had alarmed the pilot. He turned around and then

shouted something imperative in Vurna, his hand going swiftly to his own belt.

Price beat him by a fractional second. His hand pressed the trigger and the unfamiliar weapon crackled in his hand, and the pilot fell over, letting his own shocker go skittering to the deck. The aerodyne had not swerved from its steady westward flight. He had been sure, from what he'd seen of its automatic stability, that it wouldn't.

Price straightened up, breathing heavily with excitement. So far, so good.

He tied Linna's hands and feet securely with her own belt and his handkerchief, and then attended to the pilot. Linna was already beginning to stir, and he propped her up as comfortably as possible, smoothing her hair back from her forehead. He smiled suddenly and said, "I'm sorry. I really am. If there had been any other way, I wouldn't have done it."

He kissed her on the mouth, rather swiftly because he did not have much time, but with a full measure of feeling even so. She sighed, and he thought her lips answered his, but he doubted if that would be so when she came to.

He slipped into the pilot's chair and studied the controls, erasing

every other thought from his mind as he remembered what he had learned from watching. The aerodyne was humming straight and steadily on. He had plenty of altitude.

He began to experiment, gingerly, and by the time he was across the river he was satisfied that he could control the craft well enough to get by. It was considerably simpler than learning to drive a car in the old days, and he had a lifetime of flying behind him to give him air-sense. The craft itself was a thing of beauty, topping anything he had ever flown. He angled southward and westward, away from the river, traveling like a bullet.

Linna spoke from behind him. Her voice was very cold and very hard, the voice of a stranger.

"Arrin told me I should have you bound. I left you free on my own responsibility."

Price felt bad about that, and he said so. "Try to look at it from my side, Linna. I have to do what I can for my own people. If you were in my shoes - - -"

"Go ahead," said Linna. "Talk is obviously useless. I shan't waste any more of it, except to tell you - - -"

She told him, vividly, what kind of a fool he was, and what she hoped would happen to him be-

fore he led all of his fellow-fools to destruction. Then she shut up and would not speak again, no matter how he tried to soften her rage.

The dark green forest, rough-textured like a wool rug, rolled back and away around him, and the sun was swallowed up in clouds. He strained his eyes for the clearing that would mark the Capitol of the Missouris. He was flying by dead reckoning. He had no compass bearing to begin with, and the Vurna instruments were useless to him. The pilot was beginning to come round, but Price knew better than to ask him for instructions.

It was a red light of fires burning on the edge of night that guided him down at last toward the timber-built Capitol. And now at last Linna spoke, because the pilot, looking out, began to yell frantically in Vurna. She translated.

"He says do not cut the down-blast so sharply, or you will crash. That lever - - - there, under your left hand - - - ease it back."

Price eased it. He settled down to a rough and ragged landing, just about where the Vurna craft had settled before, when he had been Sawyer's prisoner. Men came out of the houses and along the streets, to stand as they had stood

then, to greet their hated overlords with silence and contempt.

Price jumped out of the craft and approached the fires.

THERE WAS a startled cry, and then his name echoed back and forth, and the men closed around him. They were inclined to be hostile, demanding to know where Sawyer was, and what had happened, and how he came to be piloting a Vurna flier. Price shouted for quiet.

"Sawyer's alive. He's a prisoner in the Citadel. So are Burr and Twist. You want to rescue them?"

That startled them. "Listen," Price started, and then he saw Oakes pushing toward him with a small determined-looking group of men.

"Stand back," Oakes demanded. "Stand back, there. This man is a traitor. He betrayed the council, he betrayed Sawyer. If you listen to him, he'll betray you." He turned to Price. "You get back to your Vurna masters. Tell them we're not going to - - -"

"Oh, shut up," said Price impatiently. "You're not chief here, and you never will be, no matter if you do leave Sawyer to rot in the Citadel." He took the shocker from his belt where he had thrust it. "I stole that flier from the Vurna, and I stole this, too. I'll

use it on you if I have to."

Oakes looked ugly, but he hesitated, and Price said, "Some of you, if you want proof of what I say, go look in the flier. Go on."

Several men detached themselves from the crowd and went off at a trot toward the flier. Presently they began to whoop and halloo. They came back carrying the pilot and Linna, who looked at Price with the utmost hatred.

"It looks like a trick to me," said Oakes. "They could have been bound on purpose."

Price said, "Does it look like a trick that every starship of the Citadel fleet took off last night? You must have heard or seen them, even at this distance."

"Yes," said a lean farmer, "streaks of fire in the sky before dawn. I was milking."

Others had seen them, too. And now a note of excitement crept into their voices.

"What's it mean? What's happened there? What are you after?"

"The Citadel is stripped," he said. "And I know where the fire-control is that commands the Belt. With this flier I can land right on the Citadel without being challenged. I can take some of you with me, and we can knock out those weapons. You can walk right in, with no more opposition than brave men ought to be able to

handle. You - - -"

"Price," said Linna, in a voice of absolute horror, "you don't know what you're doing. The fleet has gone out to fight the Ei. Arrin forced some information out of the captives - - - the Ei fleet is somewhere outside this solar system, and our fleet's out to intercept it."

The terror in her voice increased. "But if the Ei forces evade our fleet and strike directly at our base here - - - don't you see, only our great missile-batteries around the Citadel can defend Earth! If you storm the Citadel, there'll be no defenses at all."

He said, "Linna, I know you believe in the Ei. Probably most of your people do. But you've never seen one, in a century no one on Earth has seen one. They're a myth, a political stratagem, that's all."

She shook her head, groping desperately for words. "Don't follow him!" she cried out to the men. "Don't listen to him. We're fighting for your lives and safety too. Don't be so mad as to stab us in the back now!"

They looked at her in the firelight, the flint-faced men who were weary of Star Lords. Then, without paying Oakes any attention at all, they looked at Price.

"He's right," drawled one of them. "The star-spawn have given

us the lie about the Ei too long. Ain't a kid on Earth believes it."

Linna's head bent hopelessly forward, and she turned away. She still believes it, every word, thought Price. Poor Linna. He would have given anything to comfort her.

But there was no time for comfort, no time for anything but planning. He said,

"You've heard, you know this chance may never come again - - - are you with me?" And they answered *Yes!*

"All right," said Price. "All right, we've got to have a council, to make plans, and then we'll have to move fast to strike before the fleet comes back. Who are your leaders after Sawyer?"

Five or six men came forward, district sub-chiefs. One of them nodded his head toward the two Vurna.

"What'll we do with them?"

"Treat them well," said Price sternly. "They're your assurance of Sawyer's life." He didn't know whether they were or not, but he didn't want Linna to suffer even discomfort because of him. He added, "Make sure they don't talk to anyone, though. And remember, there was a traitor at the big council. You'd better all keep a lookout, for signals and communication-devices. And now let's talk."

THE COUNCIL lasted far into the night. Price's biggest problem was to persuade the tribesmen not to bring their guns.

"The metal-detector units on the flying eyes would spot you before you'd gone ten miles into the Belt, and I can't take the control-room that far ahead. It couldn't possibly be held that long, and no matter how we might smash the weapon-controls they'd have time to patch them up and use them on you. You'll have to infiltrate the Belt on all sides, keeping under cover, and get within striking distance before I land on the Citadel. Besides, against the Vurna shockers, your guns aren't much more use than your hunting holos. We'll try and give you better weapons, once we're inside."

"Of course," said one leathery-faced sub-chief, "when you've got us and the Ohios and Kentucky's and the rest all in the Belt, it would be a mighty easy thing for you to give them word at the Citadel, and have us all wiped out at once, like that."

Price said harshly, "It's up to you, whether you want to take the gamble or not. If I'm on the level, you can take the Citadel and get the Star Lords off your back. If I'm not, you're dead. But you won't get a chance like this again. Make up your minds."

They made them up.

"How shall word be sent in time to the other tribes? It'd take days for a man on horseback to get around to the east and north."

"I'll take the word," said Price. "In the flier. By sundown tomorrow, there'll be men from every tribe ready to move into the Belt. And pick me half a dozen seasoned men to go along, under a sub-chief. Half a dozen men you can trust for the fate of the whole attack."

The leathery old chief, whose name was Sweetbriar, said quietly, "I'll pick you six, and I'll go along."

His gaze locked with Price's, and Price smiled.

"I'll give you the shocker," he said. "You can use it any time you see fit. And *that* should convince the other tribes they can count on me."

"Should," said Sweetbriar, nodding. "Now we'd better reckon up our distance. As I see it, this'll work out something like a big beat, and if we don't all get there together, we might better have stayed home."

They settled all the details, the forced marches by night, the meager weight of food each man was to carry. Price managed to get an hour's sleep before he took off in the pre-dawn gloom to rouse the

other tribes. When he slept he dreamed of an iron mountain, impregnable, crowned with destruction, watching incessantly with a thousand eyes. In the dream, he knew that no mere men could ever take it.

CHAPTER IX

THE AERODYNE flew high in the black night, toward the Citadel. Above there were clear stars. Below there were heavy clouds laced with lightning, hiding the earth. Hiding the Belt, and the lines of men who moved in it, among the dark trees, in the wind and the rain.

One full night had passed, and another was drawing to its close. Before the sun went down again it would be all over, one way or the other.

Price was in that state of exaltation that comes at a certain point of prolonged tension without rest, where you move a little bit outside your body and above the ground, detached from every normal consideration, and everything seems to go with a clear headlong rush, as though a single initiating act has set an inevitable series of reactions going, and all you have to do is keep pace with them. He had not slept much, but he was not tired. The aspect of the

Citadel roof, the round red circle of the lift and the controls thereof, the symbol marking the proper level, the shape and size and position of the fire-control center, burned brightly in his mind. Their set and proper sequence did not permit of any obstacles.

Sweetbriar sat beside him in the co-pilot's place. He held the shocker in his gnarly hands, and from time to time he turned it over or stroked its smooth and unfamiliar shape. So far he had not had any occasion to use it. He had stood beside Price in a dozen wooden-built towns, helping him harangue a dozen doubtful chiefs, or sub-chiefs, around the perimeter of the Belt. He had not slept much, either, but his eye was brilliant and steely as a hawk's. If the sensation of flight frightened him, he had not shown it in any way.

The six men of his picking sat quietly in the cabin. They might have been the same six men Price had first met when he landed in the Belt, woods-rangers, hunters of deer and wild cattle, all speed and muscle, born fighters. They were as lax as idle hound-dogs now, when there was nothing to be done. They, too, had mastered whatever fear they had had of flying.

The storm below was moving

rapidly toward the east, over a broad front. Price could easily have outflown it, but he did not, only keeping high enough above it to get a sighting on the Citadel when it came into visual range. He was grateful for the storm. It seemed like an omen of good fortune. It would cover the advance of the tribesmen from the west, and it would cover his own landing, if he paced it properly. A thick night would make it easier to get his attacking party onto the lift, and perhaps even below, before it was realized that they were not Linna's party returning.

Poor Linna. He had seen her for just a minute before he left the Capitol of the Missouris. He had wanted to make sure she was safe and comfortable, and he had wanted to try once more to make her understand how he felt.

"I'm not your enemy, Linna," he had said. "Believe that. After this is all over - - -"

"If you take the Citadel," she had answered, "it won't matter who is anybody's enemy. You and I will both be victims of the Ei. If you don't take it - - - you'll be dead, and so will your crazy army, and how long will they let me live after that? Either way, both of us lose."

And she had sounded so quietly despairing, that he had almost

lost heart.

But not quite.

Starshine and the lower flarings of lightning showed him a gleam of dark metal far down in the night. He spoke to Sweetbriar and pointed. The old man peered, squinting, and the six hunters roused themselves and peered also.

"Don't look like much from here," one of them said.

Price did not dispute him. Perhaps it was just as well for his army of seven not to have too clear a look at the fortress they were planning to invade.

He hung for a little time in the high quiet air, watching the storm front roll like a wave. When it had almost reached the distant gleam of metal he said sharply,

"All right, now!"

And he dropped the aerodyne whistling down the sky.

THE WILD air-currents caught him, boiling ahead of the storm and over it. For one horrible moment he thought he had lost control of the aerodyne. It pitched and skittered and tossed, throwing him against his seat-belt until his ribs cracked and his flesh felt as though it was cut through. The tribesmen were now frankly and vocally terrified. Then the built-in stabilizers and Price's own flier's brain took hold again,

and the whirling-leaf motion steadied to a rough and racking but controlled descent.

He could not see anything now but the solid blackness of the storm-clouds, until the lightning flared and lit the rain-swept barren below with a vivid light, brief but enough to guide him. He had judged carefully, and he let the main wind-drift carry him until the wall of the Citadel showed up huge and startling in the glare of a striking bolt. He hung rocking over the roof until another one showed him the painted circle of the lift. Then he set the aerodyne down hard right beside it.

There was no need for any talking. The instructions had all been thoroughly discussed before. Price and the seven tribesmen were out and across the intervening few feet of roof and onto the lift and going down before the next flare of lightning broke.

The men breathed heavily, their throwing ropes in one hand, their knives in the other. Sweetbriar glanced at the shocker. Then he gave it to Price and unhooked the weighted bolo from his own belt, swinging it gently.

There had been no alarm.

Price watched the symbols gliding past on the guide-strip. When the right one showed he pushed the proper stud and waited. The

lift stopped. The automatic door slid back. They moved fast, out into the corridor.

Only one man was in sight, going somewhere with a sheaf of papers in his hand. He stopped, and his eyes widened, and his mouth opened. Price fired the shocker. The man fell down and the papers scattered all over the floor. Price began to run. His own shoes made a quick sharp patting on the plastic surface. The moccasins of the hunters made no sound at all. He counted the doors, and then turned for a last glance at Sweetbriar and the men. Their eyes were very bright and the edges of their teeth showed. Sweetbriar nodded.

Price flung open the door.

And it was easy, easier than he had dreamed. The four technicians in their uniforms of dull gold turned and stood startled and staring for as long as a man might catch his breath, and that was time enough. Bolos wrapped around three of them like flying snakes and brought them down, and the fourth fell under the shock-beam.

"Shut the door," said Price, and one of the hunters shut it.

Price knocked out the other three with the shocker, and the hunters bound them. There was a rack of side-arms in one wall, with several shockers in it. Price handed them out and then turned his attention

to the batteries of firing-studs. The hunters stood staring at the moving pictures of the stormy Belt reflected in the scanner screens, until Sweetbriar sent them to guard the door.

There were service-hatches below the waist-high control panels. Price got one open and studied the wiring, panting more with excitement than exertion. It was only a few minutes until the pre-arranged time of attack. But he must not trip the firing relays accidentally in trying to de-activate them. He was afraid to start pulling wires indiscriminately.

But where the individual leads ran back to join the primary cable they passed through a series of switches. It seemed logical to Price that these were safety cut-offs to be used during maintenance, and that they would cut off the nameless destructive engines on the roof.

He had nothing better to go on, and time had almost run out. He opened one of the switches, and glanced swiftly at the screens. Nothing happened. He flipped open the others fast, and ripped the wires loose from the board. Then with a metal chair he smashed the studs.

As he finished, Sweetbriar shouted suddenly. "There they come - - - and right on time!"

Price, sweating, looked up. Sweetbriar and the hunters were

eagerly gazing at the screens.

They showed the storm-swept Belt and they showed small dark figures in it - - - hundreds of them - - - thousands - - - tribesmen running toward the Citadel.

An alarm-bell rang somewhere in the Citadel. Instantly other bells echoed it, a distant confusion of alarms.

"Out of here fast," Price cried. "This is the first place the Vurna will be coming. If we can get down through, we can help the others."

They ran back out of the room, back down the corridor past the unconscious man who still lay on the floor. Whatever happened now, the tribesmen pouring across the Belt were safe from the weapons on the roof.

Without warning the lift-door opened right in front of them and five green-clad Vurna came spilling out of it.

There was no chance to use shockers or bolos either - - - they were so close to each other that it was hands and fists. They struggled, gripping and striking at each other, their feet slipping on the smooth floor, with the clamor of bells in the background.

A new note was added to that clamor. A dim sound of yelling voices, many of them surging up from the lower part of the Citadel.

"The tribes are in!" shouted Sweetbriar. "By God, I - - -"

HE WAS KNOCKED back by a flailing green arm. His Vurna antagonist scrambled to get his shocker out of his belt. Price desperately kicked out at his own personal foe and banged him back against the metal wall. He saw the silver head bang the wall, and the man sagged at the knees.

Price rushed and knocked up the shocker now levelled at Sweetbriar. The hunters yelped, their eyes blazing. It was their kind of a fight. They liked it. After a sullen lifetime, they were using their fists on the Star Lords and they liked that.

The surge of sound from levels underneath told of a far bigger melee down there, spreading through the Citadel. And then that sound, and the small, personal noises of their own staggering fight, were cut across by a brutal authoritative new sound.

A hooting, loud and commanding, getting louder by the second, braying like the voice of doom through the vast iron pile.

The two Vurna still left on their feet tried to turn and run down the corridor. The hunter's bolos brought them down quickly.

Sweetbriar's leathery old face was wild and startled as he got to

his feet. "What the hell - - -"

"That's the Vurna's big battlestations siren!" Price said. "They're a bit late with it. Come on!"

He and the hunters began to look for stairs, racing swiftly along the deserted corridors. They found some at last, and sped downward, level after level.

Bellowing, deafening in volume now, the siren kept hooting.

It could not drown out the tumultuous uproar that filled the lower levels. Price and the hunters were met suddenly by a mass of tribesmen boiling up from the ground level. They were screaming, laughing, capering in the halls, dragging with them one or two captured Vurna - - - triumphant victors, dancing down a hated power under their moccasined feet. Their hair and beards and their clothing were still dripping wet with rain.

They swept up Price and Sweetbriar and the six others in their advancing front, pounding their shoulders, hugging them.

"We did it! We got 'em!" they cried. "We took the Citadel!"

"Is it all over?" asked Price incredulously. "So soon?"

"That mighty caterwauling did it," said a red-bearded man. "All of a sudden they quit fighting and began to run, like it was a signal, but they couldn't get away from us. I heard they got old Arrin his-

self down there, in a big room, cussing and crying fit to bust."

"Where's Sawyer?" somebody shouted, and Sweetbriar took up the cry. Price said,

"Somewhere on this level, I think. Get a Vurna that speaks English and make him show you. It'll save time."

He pushed on through them to the stairs, and fought his way down. He wanted to see Arrin. He wanted to see the pride of the Citadel humbled, broken.

Tribesmen rioted through the corridors, smashing things like happy children. They directed him to a vast sunken room that Price knew must be the very heart and soul of the Citadel, its reason for being. It was an overpowering place of screens and towering panels and complex equipment. But these screens looked far beyond Earth, showing starry spaces, burning suns and unimaginable dark abysses. From here the Vurna had watched the whole sector of outer space, and these complex controls must be the triggers of the mighty missile-batteries outside the Citadel, the weapons that could strike fast and far into the void.

Here there was a guard to keep out the roisterers. The soberer of the tribesmen had a sensible concern for the possible results of tampering with these incompre-

hensible but obviously mighty powers. They were afraid the whole Citadel might blow up with them in it. A few technicians were still being hustled out as Price entered.

A number of the chiefs were in here, and Arrin was with them, but he was neither cursing nor crying. He was standing between two muscular tribesmen, facing the chiefs, and his face held such an agony of despair and terror that Price was shaken by it.

"What must I do," he was saying, "to make you understand? That warning came from our fleet. The Ei have evaded it in the Centaurus Gulf, and are sweeping in toward Earth. If we don't defend the Citadel - - -"

He broke off as he saw Price come up. Then he said bitterly, "I congratulate you. Few men can say that practically single-handed they destroyed a world."

One of the chiefs asked Price, "Is Sawyer with you?"

Price shook his head. "They've gone to free him now. He'll be here in a few minutes."

"Oh my God," said Arrin softly. "Don't let them free the Ei. Even two of them at large here - - - we'd have no hope at all, with their fleet coming." He looked at Price and Price's confident scorn drained slowly out of him leaving a nasty void. Nobody, Vurna or

not, could counterfeit what he saw in Arrin's eyes.

"Do you wish me to go on my knees and beg?" whispered Arrin. "I'll do it. Only go up and stop them from opening that bulkhead."

And Price knew suddenly that he must do that.

HE TURNED and ran back along the hall and up the stairs, pushing and kicking his way past the knots of tribesmen who wanted to congratulate him for what he had done, and all the way there was a chill unpleasant thing riding his back, and its first name was Doubt, and its second, Fear.

Was it possible, just barely possible, that the Vurna had been telling the truth all the time?

Uproar on the prison level guided him through a maze of corridors, to an obligato of breaking doors. He turned a corner. Burr and Twist and Sawyer were free. They formed part of the forefront of a group that was swarming down the hall systematically breaking down the cell doors. Two Vurna guards lay prone, and a third man, probably the English-speaking guide, was trying to crawl away unnoticed, his face ashen with fear.

The bulkhead was open.

A man's voice neighed sudden-

ly in terror. Then another, and another, and the tribesmen were rolled back upon themselves as by the blow of a great hand, as the fore edge of the group turned and burst its way to the rear. There was a moment of wild panic. Price stood flat against the wall and watched brave men run by him sobbing. And then a wave of force, so cold and alien that it revolted the last small atom of his human self, hit his mind like the backblast of a bomb.

Two dark forms stood in the corridor.

They were taller than men. At first Price thought they were shrouded in black like old monks, with cowls over their heads. But as they moved he saw that the cowls and the floating draperies edged with a thin translucent gray were their own substance, quivering, shifting, gliding around some unguessable central core of being. He could not see whether they had faces under the black folds, and eyes in the faces, but he could feel them watching him. He could feel their minds stripping him and tearing away his feeble defenses, leaving his own mind naked and helpless before them.

And these were the Ei. These were the Big Lie of the Vurna.

Only they were real!

He could not stand them any

longer. He ran.

They all ran. It was a compulsion. Run. Cry panic. Clear the Citadel and get away!

He looked back and the Ei were behind them, gliding soundlessly along the hall.

Run. Get away

And then Price and the others, fleeing in the next corridor collided with the chiefs who were hurrying to find out what had happened. They still had Arrin with them, a prisoner.

"Out," said Sawyer thickly, his voice a hoarse croak. "Get out, fast - - - -"

Arrin's voice cracked like a silver whiplash. "Yes, run. Because they're making you, because their minds are too much for you! Run, and let them have the Citadel, and when their fleet comes, let them have the Earth!"

That stopped them. The horror they felt at that thought surged up so strong that the frantic compulsion to flee lessened a little. But behind them, somewhere back in the corridors, they would be following

Arrin raged and mocked them. "We saved you from the Ei two generations ago, when Ei ships had smashed your defenses and they were ready to move in. We moved in first, we've held them back, but now you've let them in!

So run!"

"Good God!" said Sawyer, his face stricken. "Then it was all true, what you told us about the Ei. It was true all the time!"

PRICE DID NOT, like the other Earthmen, have a lifetime's thinking to revise. He grabbed Arrin's shoulders.

"Can we face them?" he cried. "Can we kill them?"

"They can be killed," Arrin said. "Their minds can hold many - - - but not an unlimited number. If we all rush them, many of us, there is a chance"

Price yelled down the corridors, "What are you running from? There's only two of them. We're going back! We're going to pull them down!"

The tribesmen, their first horror a little abated, by sheer reaction from shame of their own terror, exploded into sudden rage.

"There's only two of them - - - come on!"

And then of a sudden they were all of them running back down the corridors, jostling, crowding, screaming, Price with Arrin beside him, with old Sweetbriar ahead, with Sawyer shouting in hoarse anger. A mob, not an army, a mob urged forward by its own horror.

Around the corner, and into the

corridor where the two black shapes came gliding fast. And it was like walking into night and death, into bitter black winds and the stabbing of cruel swords, as the might of alien minds blasted at them.

Tribesmen screamed and fell, clawing at their own heads. The mass behind forced over them, forced the reeling first wave right into the unimaginable shapes.

"Pull them down!"

Price was in the screeching forefront now and he closed his eyes and struck with his knife at the cloudy darkness of a cowl.

A cold like that of outer space struck through him and he staggered, fainting and falling, and his mind closed on the awful sight of packed men swaying and pulling and striking at the two tall cowed shapes, mobbing them, beating them down.

When Price opened his eyes he was in another corridor and old Sawyer was slapping his face with rough hands.

"Yes," said Sawyer thickly. "They're dead. And a good many men dead with them, and some others that act like their brains are dead."

He shook his head, a little wildly. "To think it was true all the time - - -"

Whoom! came a deep sound from outside the Citadel. And then

more of them, in quick succession. *Whoom! Whoom! Whoom!*

"Arrin - - -" said Price, getting weakly to his feet.

"He's down in that room, with his men," said Sawyer. "And they're turning loose on that Ei fleet out in space."

And now the great missiles from the launchers outside the Citadel were going out so fast that the sounds of them could not be counted.

Price said, "Then you let him - - -"

"Let him?" repeated Sawyer. "We asked him! Do you think we want a whole fleet of - - - of them - - - - reaching Earth?"

By the time Price and Sawyer got down to the missile-control room, the deadly messengers were all on their way.

Arrin and his men watched the screens, and would not turn from them. Price, and the tribesmen, saw only burning stars and dark space in those screens - - - and then, finally, a little crackling of pin-prick flares running like a swarm of fireflies in the dark void. Then nothing.

Arrin turned.

Sawyer said, painfully, "Did they - - - ?"

"Yes," said Arrin. "We caught them - - - but none too soon. Our fleet out there will mop up any

Ei ships that survived."

He added, with slow weariness, "We've won a battle - - - not a war. The Ei are many. But this outpost world is safe. And we'll press them back and back - - -"

Sawyer looked at Price. Price said, "Don't be so damned proud. Go ahead and say it."

Sawyer said to Arrin, "Seems like we were wrong about some things. About you Vurna. We're hoping things'll be different between us, now."

"They can be," Arrin said.

"They will be, if you want it."

The old Chief of the Missouri asked, "Now it's all cleared up, just who *was* the traitor among us? Was it Oakes?"

For the first time, a little smile touched Arrin's face. "Do you really want to know, now it's over?"

Sawyer grunted. "Guess not." He looked around the other chiefs, and then stuck his gnarled hand out in the oldest gesture of Earth, and Arrin took it.

PPRICE AND LINNA stood next day on the roof of the Citadel and watched the tribesmen going home.

There was, there had always been, a stiff-necked pride in the men of Earth. They went away with their heads up, not looking

back. But, at the edge of the distant forest, there was a face turned and the flash of a handwave before they went into the trees.

"They'll come back," Price said. "A few of them at first - - - then more and more, to learn. A few years will make all the difference."

He thought that the sons of Earth and the sons of the stars would together stand upon many far worlds. The long war against the Ei would end some day, that dark and alien tide would be rolled back, and Earthmen would do their share. But that was all to come.

Linna was saying earnestly, "And the people of your own hidden colony in the west - - - they will join us too?"

Price looked at her. "There is no colony, Linna. I came alone from the west."

"But your clothes - - - your plane - - - where *did* you come from?" She was startled, her eyes wide and wondering.

"I'll explain all that later. You won't believe it, at first. I hardly do myself."

And, thinking of the strange freak of force and chance that had snatched him from the older Earth, Price felt a last pang of nostalgia for that lost world of long ago. That time when, safe on their cozy little planet, men had dreamed of

space and stars - - - it seemed now like a long-dead idyll of youth.

The Earth of those days could never come again. The wider galaxy had crashed in upon it, and terrible and magnificent realities had shattered the youthful dreams, and it was a different and sterner

planet that was joining the community of star-worlds. Who knew what awaited it on that wider, cosmic stage? His hand tightened on Linna's. Of their own tiny part in that vast future, he felt suddenly very sure.

THE END



Trouble On Sun-Side

by

S. M. Jenneshaw

Jansen came to Mercury to find one man, and that seemed an easy enough task; the hitch was that as a hunter he was also being hunted!

JANSEN BEGAN to sweat as soon as he left the spaceship. The bloated, swollen sun hovering near the horizon here in twilight zone was dazzling even through his protective goggles. Jansen knew he would have to get used to it: Mercury's twilight zone, like it or not, would be his home for the indefinite future.

Stowing his gear in the barracks while sweat streamed from his body, Jansen realized for the first time that his luggage had been examined aboard the spaceship. That was bad; it could mean anything; it certainly meant trouble.

I have to hurry, Jansen thought. In a day or so, they're liable to haul me in for questioning.

"Still time for me to go out and join the work force?" Jansen asked the barracks orderly as the old man came shuffling by.

"Eager, ain't you, mister. They'll

get along without you till tomorrow, you can bet."

"Well, can I go take a look, then?"

The old man studied him with surprise. Apparently gold-bricking and not eager-beaving was the order of the day here. "What's your rating?" the orderly asked.

"Twelve."

"Well, nobody would push you around, I guess," admitted the barracks orderly with grudging respect. "Why don't you see the town, though? Town's all right. Don't go out to the bogs unless you have to."

Bogs, thought Jansen. Bogs on Mercury's sun-side. He still couldn't get over it.

Jansen changed into a skin tight white insulsuit and went outside. The insulsuit covered him almost like an additional layer of skin: he wore trousers and a shirt over



it. Without the insult, exposure this close to Mercury's sun-side would be impossible for more than a few moments.

It took Jansen twenty minutes to realize he was being followed. His tail wore an insult and a pair of colorful shorts. This seemed to be the universal garb in Sun-side City, so that the hundreds of

loungers and shoppers all looked alike, with the skull-cap cowls of their insults even hiding the distinctiveness of their hair. Jansen's tail was a man bigger than most, though, and it was only because he was wandering aimlessly in the sun-dazzled streets that Jansen became aware of pursuit at all.

He ducked into an alley between

two cafes. Two women in skin-tight insul suits came by, then a man and a boy, then the big man who had been following Jansen. Abruptly Jansen stepped from the alley.

"Just a minute," he said.

The man whirled, a blank expression on his face.

"What do you want?" Jansen asked.

"I don't get you, mister. You stopped me, I didn't stop you. What do *you* want?"

"You were following me," Jansen said.

"I never saw you before in my life."

Before Jansen could answer, the sun went down. It did not set, as the sun sets on Earth. It disappeared, due to the sudden unpredictable wobbles of Mercury's twilight zone. It was an astronomical phenomena. And, despite the sun's great apparent size, Jansen suddenly found himself in pitch darkness. It alarmed him at first, until he realized that Mercury had no atmosphere, except for the artificial pockets under the man-made domes. There was no layer of air to retain the sun's glow. One moment, dazzling light; the next, almost total darkness.

"Where are you?" Jansen called. He groped his way toward where the man had been standing.

He heard a girl's laughter on the street nearby, heard an old woman's shout.

Something struck the side of his head, summoning blinding pain. Jansen staggered and fell to the sidewalk on hands and knees. He felt himself being frisked expertly in his half-conscious state. Something was removed from his trouser-pocket: his wallet probably. He tried to get up but fell forward, scraping his jaw. He heard retreating footsteps.

Number one botch-job, he thought, and lost consciousness.

WHEN HE CAME TO, he was not alone. He was no longer on the sidewalk, either. He had been taken into a house.

He found himself looking at a girl in insul suit and shorts. The forehead-piece of the girl's skin-tight cowl came down in a sharp widow's peak, in the current feminine fashion. It made her entire face, with its high cheek bones and long narrow eyes and small, stubborn, pointed chin, look somewhat aquatic. She was a very pretty girl and her figure under the revealing insul suit was breath-taking.

"You're all right, Mr. Jansen?" she asked.

Jansen. She'd called him by his name. He was on his guard at once. He'd gotten work at the Sun-sta-

tion employment office—on Earth as Wilson. His name was unknown here on Mercury — except to the person who'd gone through his bags aboard ship and the big man who'd taken his wallet on the street.

He nodded his head slowly. His head ached and he felt weak and washed out, but he could feel the strength flowing back into him.

The woman smiled. Then the smile left her face so quickly, it startled Jansen. "We don't want you here," she said. "We don't want you on Mercury, Jansen."

He stood up. "Thanks for dragging me in off the street. I'll get out of here now."

"Leave Mercury, Mr. Jansen. While you still can."

He headed for the door, his temple throbbing with pain. She helped him across the room coolly, efficiently, supporting his shoulder but barely seeming to touch him. He wished his head was clearer. He wanted to question this girl. She knew him; she'd had him tailed.

"Get out while you can," she was saying. "Remember what happened to your brother."

He whirled on the threshold and pushed her back into the room ahead of him. "Go ahead," he said coldly. "Tell me about my brother."

Her face told him she knew

she'd blundered. "Just get out of here, you fool!" she cried.

"Tell me about my brother."

"He's dead. What does it matter except he's dead?"

"How did he die, Miss Hilliard?"

She gave him a startled look. "You know me?"

"A guess. You're Wendy Hilliard, aren't you?"

"Y-yes."

"He used to write me about you," Jansen said bitterly. "Girl Friday or something. But when he started to go down you took off like the well-known rats. Didn't you, Wendy?"

Her hand struck his cheek stinging. "Now clear out," she said, her voice catching on a sob.

He laughed harshly. "Well, what did you expect? It's why you had my things searched on the ship, isn't it? It's why you had that big guy follow me."

Wendy Hilliard's face was white. "I didn't have your things searched on the ship," she said.

He looked at her searchingly: she meant that, he knew.

"Oh, don't you see?" she said, clutching his arm. "Don't you see? It was Bareen, Mr. Jansen. I know you're here and Bareen knows it. It was Bareen who had your brother killed and - -"

"Why?" Jansen asked.

"Because he knew too much. Be-

cause Bareen is going to become the richest man in the solar system and — and Ted got an inkling of what was happening.”

“You seem to know,” Jansen said dryly. “But you’re still here. So what happened to Ted?”

“Look, Mr. Jansen. Let me give you about a five minute course in Mercurian economics. Here at Sun-side station, we produce food for Earth’s teeming billions. Since directly or indirectly, all food is stored solar energy and since we’re much closer to the sun here, food-energy is produced abundantly and not expensively.”

“I know all that,” Jansen said irritably.

“Let me finish. You’ll see why. What we grow in the sun-side bogs is chlorella, millions of tons of chlorella, which is converted into synth-steak and other pseudo-meats on Earth. Now, there are two keys to the production. The first, of course, is water. Chlorella must grow in bogs, which means artificial irrigation. The second is the sub-space tunnel. You know about that, Jansen. Call it a hole in space which shortcuts the distance between Mercury and Earth. The chlorella is shipped Earthward through this sub-space tunnel, not only instantly, but cheaply.

“Bareen works the tunnel, Mr. Jansen. Bareen’s men control the

irrigation station. Bareen is now in a position to demand any price he wishes from Earth for the chlorella. If Earth doesn’t agree, Earth starves. That’s why your brother was killed. He learned about this before Bareen was ready to strike. He’s almost ready now, Mr. Jansen.”

“Where do you fit in? If Ted was killed — ”

Wendy’s face colored. “I wanted to go on living, Mr. Jansen. I didn’t want to die. I can’t be an idealist if my own life — ”

“What did you do?” His hand gripped her wrist. “Did you turn Ted over to Bareen?”

She struck his face a second time. “I loved your brother. I wouldn’t have done a thing like that.”

“Then what?”

“I told you what you wanted to know. I don’t have to tell you more. Now get out of here.” She followed him to the door. “But you have to leave Mercury at once, you see,” she said. “Bareen can’t afford to let you live. Bareen will have you killed.”

“The way they tell it on Earth, Bareen’s a loner. If he goes, the whole outfit folds and will play ball with Earth the way it ought to. Is that the way you see it?”

“Yes, but — ”

“You thought I was here for re-

venge? I am, baby. Don't get any wrong ideas. But I've also got a job to do. Earth needs that chlor-ella." He opened the door.

"Jansen —"

"Well?"

"Nothing. Just be careful."

He laughed harshly and walked out into the darkness.

THE MAN'S NAME was Dinnison. He had the bunk next to Jansen's in the barracks and he, like Jansen, was a newcomer. He'd shipped to Mercury from the Venusian dust-desert in search of greener pastures. Jansen felt sorry for him, then ruthlessly beat down the feeling. He had no time for pity.

While it was still dark he followed Dinnison outside the barracks and thrust a mugging arm around his neck. Dinnison struggled, his arms flailing, his legs drumming. Once he almost broke loose, but Jansen held him until he had lost consciousness. *A day, Jansen thought. Bareen knows I'm here, so all I can expect is a day now.*

He dragged Dinnison into a storage shed. The slight effort left him drenched with sweat, despite the insulsuit. He found rope and bound Dinnison, then took tape from his pocket and gagged him.

Ten minutes later he returned to the barracks with Dinison's

identification papers. *Andrew Dinnison*, he thought. *I'm Dinnison now.* Bareen's men would be looking for Frank Jansen, he knew. But unless Wendy Hilliard told them, they wouldn't know what Jansen looked like.

I'm Dinnison

He slept poorly. He dreamed but in the morning did not remember his dreams. When he awoke, Mercury had wobbled sufficiently for the twilight zone to be in sunlight again.

"Rise and shine, men!" a supervisor's voice blared over the loudspeaker. "Got some gunk to harvest!"

Jansen watched the men get up, groaning and complaining, in the barracks. Gunk was the supervisor's word for chlorella, Jansen thought. Looking at the men he decided they had other words for it, none of them printable. For, although the pay was good, it was sheer hell working on Mercury and the average employee at the chlor-ella bogs didn't stay more than three months.

With the others Jansen went outside and piled onto one of the half dozen swamp buggies which came for them. The buggies were surplus Army amphibian vehicles and rattled noisily over dry ground. They formed a line, single file, and headed through the domed corri-

dor that connected Sun-side city, which was actually in the twilight zone, with the bogs themselves, which were on the sun-side of Mercury.

If it had been hot in the city, despite man's best air-conditioning efforts, it was murderously hot in the bogs. The sun burned down on the dome and through it; the irrigation water evaporated rapidly, so rapidly that the dehumidifiers could not carry it away quickly enough. As a result, the bogs were not only terribly hot, but humid as the inside of a Turkish bath. Jansen felt washed out before he'd even begun his work.

The swamp buggies took them to a field of chlorella, the valuable plant growing like a thick coating of slime on the bogs. The men, moving slowly to conserve energy in the heat, climbed down from the buggies and attacked the chlorella by sweeping the surface of the bogs with their muscle-powered harvesters.

Jansen smiled in spite of himself. Agricultural methods five thousand and more years old! It couldn't be helped on Mercury, of course. Most available machinery was needed on Earth, for Earth's billions. The metal for machinery was at a premium; the great iron mines of two centuries before were almost exhausted and no new sup-

ply had been found on any of the planets - - at least none which could be mined productively at slight enough cost. Result: the outworlds got along with primitive methods or didn't get along at all.

Dinnison, Jansen discovered, had a rating of Six. It was not as bad as it could have been, but a good deal worse than Jansen's own twelve. At least Dinnison wasn't a harvester. Instead, Dinnison had been assigned to the packing platforms, and that was where Jansen found himself working. Here the chlorella was dried in the fierce sun and baled. The baling, of course, was done by hand and the chlorella, dry enough for baling but still sodden, was heavy. Afterwards, Jansen knew, it would be taken to the sub-space tunnel and shipped to Earth without even the necessity of dehydration.

All morning Jansen worked in hot, stifling silence. Whenever a supervisor came in his direction he half-expected a heavy hand to fall on his shoulder and an accusing voice to call out his real name.

At lunch hour he wandered off, all but exhausted, into the scant shade of one of the compound shacks. He sat there, popping energy tablets into his mouth. He was too weak to eat food although he saw it being served from big trays

perhaps fifty yards away.

"Jansen," a voice called softly.

HE LOOKED UP quickly, his eyes taking seconds to focus in the almost blinding glare. It was Wendy Hilliard, looking amazingly cool in her insulsuit and shorts.

He reached up and grabbed her arm, pulling her down alongside him. "How did you find me?" he demanded.

"It was an accident, although —" her voice trailed off.

"Although what?"

"You're hurting me!"

"Although what, Miss Hilliard?"

"I — well, I was looking for you, Jansen. I want to help you."

"Sure," he said, a trace of bitterness in his voice.

She smiled. "I'd say you need some help. You look all washed out."

"Your sympathy is touching. Did you say the same thing to Ted, before he was killed?"

"You fool. I liked your brother."

"He used a different word."

"All right. I loved him. He's dead now. We can't bring him back to life."

"So what do you want?"

"Bareen's here. In the bogs today."

Instantly, Jansen was alert. He could feel fresh strength surge

through his muscles, his blood. Bareen! At last, he thought, Bareen! For Ted

And for Earth.

Ted had been an Earth agent on Mercury. Jansen was not: Jansen had been prospecting in the asteroids when he heard of Ted's death. But he'd gone to Ted's agency at once and offered his services. Now he was here, where Ted had been. Now he was in Ted's place. What would Ted have done? He didn't know. But he had his orders. They were explicit — and ruthless.

"You will report to Sun-side City," they had told him. "You will seek Bareen out. Without Bareen, the organization he has built up will crumble. With Bareen, it will gain control, complete control instead of managerial control, of the irrigation system and the sub-space tunnel. Bareen will become a fabulously wealthy and powerful man, at the expense of Earth's starving billions. You will find Bareen and kill him."

Assassination, Jansen thought now. Legally, it would be a crime. The civilized worlds would forever be closed to Jansen. But morally it would be anything but a crime. Morally, Jansen would be helping billions of people he would never see — and, if he helped them, he would be from that day forth an outcast who must live out the rest

of his life on the far outworlds.

For Ted, he thought. And Earth

"Why'd Bareen come here?" Jansen asked the girl suspiciously. "I thought he runs this show from the sub-space tunnel."

"Sure he does. But periodically he comes here to check on his men. You must have known it: why did you come here?"

"I couldn't get assigned to the sub-space tunnel. I'm no technician. I was going to figure a way in, later."

"There's no later for you. How much time do you think you have, Jansen?"

He shrugged, and asked a question of his own. "Why are you pretending to help me?"

"Ted and I —"

"He's dead now, remember?"

Wendy stood up angrily. "All right, have it your way. Bareen is here. You're here. I thought that was what you wanted. I told you. I —"

Just then the one streamlined swamp-buggy Jansen had seen came chugging up through the brackish water. A hatch opened and as it did so Wendy moved quickly away from Jansen. She waded toward the buggy, smiling. A man appeared in the hatch, a big man, big as Jansen and wider. He was younger than Jansen thought he

would be. He was handsome and somehow cold-looking.

"Wendy, my dear," Jansen heard him say. "This is a pleasant surprise."

Wendy reached the swamp-buggy. Bareen — for it was Bareen — leaned over and offered her a hand. He drew her up to him and she turned her cheek for his kiss. Then they disappeared inside the buggy and it chugged away.

Jansen sat there for a moment. Bareen, he thought. Bareen and Wendy Hilliard. Well, why not? Hadn't Ted been killed?

But why did she come to me?

Jansen stood up. His limbs trembled with heat-fatigue and he popped two salt tablets into his mouth. He began to walk.

"Hey, you!" a supervisor called. "Lunch hour's almost over. Where you going?"

Jansen didn't answer. The swamp buggy, moving slowly through the brown water, was almost out of sight. A dome corridor led from the chlorella bogs to the irrigation station, Jansen knew. The buggy was headed in that direction.

"I said, where you going?"

Jansen didn't answer the shouted question. There wasn't time. He ran, splashing through the thigh-deep water, moving clumsily and slowly. Instead of following Bareen's buggy, he headed for where

the other vehicles were parked. He climbed on one and began to unbolt the hatch when he heard boots on metal behind him.

It was the supervisor. "For the last time, buddy —"

Jansen turned and hit him. The supervisor, an astonished look on his face, stumbled back off the amphibious vehicle and into the swamp. Jansen waited to see that he got up, then slid in through the hatch and started the buggy.

There would be an alarm, he knew. But Bareen's buggy hadn't been hurrying. If he could overtake it

HE CHUGGED ALONG, expecting pursuit momentarily. He rode with the hatch open and his body half out, for best visibility. He saw the other swamp vehicle, perhaps three hundred yards ahead. It reached the narrow neck of the domed corridor and paused at the check-point there, then went through.

Soon Jansen reached the check-point. Two men with blasting rifles stood in his path, looking suspicious.

"Get out of the way!" Jansen called boldly. "I'm Bareen's body-guard."

"Behind him?"

"Where would you stay, friend?"

The guards exchanged glances.

One of them grinned. But the other one said, "We got a report of a guy who - -"

"I wouldn't be interested in any reports," Jansen said curtly. "Now, do you let me through or do I report you to Bareen?"

Glances were exchanged again. One of the guards shrugged. They didn't want trouble. Jansen's very boldness was his best weapon. Finally, exchanging glances once more, they waved him on.

The second swamp buggy was by then out of sight down the domed corridor. But half an hour later Jansen reached the big, white, squat structure which housed the irrigation machinery. And Bareen's streamlined swamp-buggy was parked outside on the dry ground.

He went inside and an armed man stood in his path. "Well?"

"Bareen," Jansen said.

"Come and gone, with Miss Hilliard."

"But his buggy - -"

"Who're you?"

"Body guard," Jansen said promptly. It had worked once.

"Hell, then you ought to know. Why ask me?"

"You know Mr. Bareen," Jansen said, smiling. "Impulsive."

"Is he? I guess I wouldn't know."

"Look. Ordinarily I wouldn't

mind passing the time of day with you, but I'm not supposed to let Bareen out of my sight. So if you'll just tell me where he is . . ."

"Show me."

"What did you say?" Jansen asked with a sickening realization of what the guard wanted.

"You say you're his bodyguard. Show me."

Jansen swung his fist in a quick, blurring arc and hit the man. He felt the pain of good contact and the man went over on his back, striking the ground hard. Jansen knelt quickly by his side: he was breathing normally. Quickly Jansen searched him and found a small hand-blaster. He pocketed it and got up, dragging the unconscious man into an alcove which housed an inter-office communications system. On impulse, Jansen picked up the microphone and said:

"Mr. Bareen, please. This is important."

"I'm sorry, sir. Mr. Bareen has taken the sub-spacer back to the interplanetary sub-space tunnel."

"Thank you," Jansen said automatically. There was a small sub-space tunnel connecting the irrigation station with the big interplanetary space-warp, Jansen knew. Even now Bareen and Wendy Hilliard, having inspected the plant, were a hundred thousand miles away, in deep space, at the

tunnel station.

While Jansen was thinking, the communications system board flashed and a voice said:

"Emergency! Emergency! Someone has stolen a buggy and is believed heading for the irrigation station. He may be armed and is probably dangerous."

Jansen acknowledged the information, then said: "The buggy just passed this way, but it kept going."

"You're sure?"

"Positive."

"Thanks. We'll relay the information."

That ruse would give him a few minutes, Jansen knew. But for what purpose?

Bareen and Wendy Hilliard! If they used the sub-space tunnel, why couldn't he?

He left the alcove and charged down a brightly-lit hallway, passing a cavern-sized room a-throb with banks of machinery. A technician looked up at him and Jansen said:

"The sub-spacer. Hurry, man. This is urgent."

The technician pointed, spoke. Jansen followed his directions on the dead run.

WHEN HE REACHED IT, he saw what looked like a vidiphone booth in a large, otherwise empty room. But vidiphone

booths don't usually have armed guards

"This is for Mr. Bareen's private use," the guard said, brandishing a blasting rifle. "Better beat it."

No ruses here. This guard would know. This was one of Bareen's private thugs, probably. Jansen took a breath and dove at him.

The blaster roared, searing air over Jansen's head. He hit the guard's middle and they went down together, the rifle falling from the guard's grasp. They rolled over and over, then the guard got to his knees and clubbed an elbow at Jansen's jaw. Jansen rolled on his back, his face suddenly numb. The guard dove for him, pinned him and called for help.

Jansen struggled frantically. He heard footsteps pounding toward them, then brought his legs up and scissored the guard's throat, pulling him down and away. Jansen released the scissors abruptly and scrambled to his feet. He made it to the sub-space booth, and pulled the door open. There was a single lever inside and he yanked at it as he slammed the transparent door. He felt nothing at first. He saw the guard retrieve his rifle, pointing it at the booth and firing.

But the blast of raw energy never reached Jansen. For he was

already being transported through subspace

He had no time to marshall his thoughts. The first thing he saw through the transparent door of the twin booth a hundred thousand miles away on the sub-space station, was Bareen. Bareen was standing just outside the booth, holding a blaster.

He was pointing the blaster at Wendy Hilliard, whose face was white. Jansen opened the door and Bareen's deep voice ended with: " . . . to kill you now."

Jansen turned quickly and fired his blaster not at Bareen but at the controls of the sub-space booth. This way, he hoped, they wouldn't be interrupted. This way - -

"Jansen!" Wendy screamed.

Bareen whirled, facing Jansen. His eyes widened and as he fired the blaster Jansen felt a numbing pain in his right leg. The blaster had merely seared him, he knew. But if Bareen had time for another try

Jansen leaped at him and they went crashing across the room toward another, and larger, sub-space booth. Jansen was exhausted. The quick pursuit, the fight at the irrigation center, the unfamiliar activity at the chlorella bogs, had drained most of the energy from his body. And Bareen was strong.

He slowly forced Jansen back, choking him. Jansen's hands waved weakly in front of his face, fluttering uselessly. Bareen was going to kill him, as he had killed his brother

Jansen's vision swam. Balls of flame seared before his eyes. He was dimly aware of Wendy clawing at Bareen's back, but the big man pushed her away, then hurled her across the room with one outflung arm.

Jansen butted with his head. He brought his knee up. He swung his fists and felt contact with Bareen's face. But Bareen held onto his throat with one large hand, getting the other one free to use the blaster. He brought it up slowly, and Jansen forgot about the hand about his throat. He reached for the blaster, struggling for possession of it with Bareen. He butted again and saw a bloody smear where Bareen's mouth had been. The blaster was between them

And roared

Bareen slumped against him and the pressure was suddenly gone from his throat. When he looked down at Bareen he saw that the man's entire face had been shot away - -

"I was working for your brother," Wendy sobbed. "I never gave up. I was gathering evidence about what

Bareen planned. You - - you came just in time. He was going to give his ultimatum to Earth today. Triple the price, or no chlorella. They'd have had to say yes."

Feet pounded in a corridor, came closer.

"We won," Jansen said. "But now - - we're finished."

"Quick!" Wendy cried, pulling him toward the larger sub-space booth. "It connects with Earth."

"I can't return to Earth. I've just killed a man. I - -"

"Self-defense. I saw you. Besides, we have the proof that Bareen was going to bleed Earth dry for chlorella."

" . . . the outworlds " he said.

"You don't have to hide on the outworlds now."

"Hide, nothing," Jansen said, smiling weakly but happily the split-second before they were whisked seventy million miles through sub-space. "If you're not a fugitive, the outworlds are wonderful. Maybe you'd like"

He was going to say, *like to join me*. It was an impulse he couldn't explain, as if the depths of sub-space drew a man's secret desires from his unconscious mind.

And as they began to materialize on Earth he heard Wendy's voice, as if from far away:

"Maybe I'd like to try that."



Temperature Study

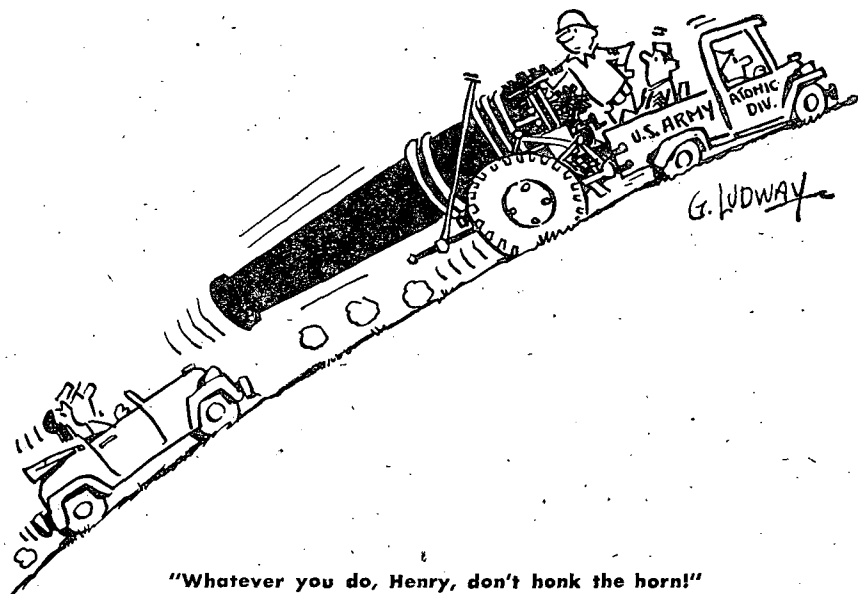


THERE WAS a time not so long ago when men were limited in the range of temperatures they could create. But all that has changed with the atomic age. It is no trick at all to re-produce the temperature of the Sun, in an atomic blast or a hydrogen fissioning process. What, is ten million degrees?

The other end of the scale, absolute zero, has also been approached. With a blend of magnetism and liquid helium, scientists pull all but the intraatomic energy from matter. Barren space between here and Arcturus could hardly be colder.

The question is, is there a limit to temperature? When an astronomical body becomes too hot, it disintegrates despite the fiercest of gravitation pressure—it blows up, as a nova. But if, as some scientists think, the primeval universe-matter, which “in the beginning”, contained all the substance of the universe, is true, then perhaps temperature is limitless and energy inexhaustible.

Living is a process of degrading energy. We use it up. With the coming of atomics, this view, once widely held as the “heat-death” theory, will have to be abandoned.



World Of The Hunter

by

C. H. Thames

Mulveen had come to Earth for a big game thrill; it was up to Gilbert to provide it for him—even if he had to let himself be stalked!

“GUN, BOY!” Mulveen cried.

The big saurian - - a thirty-tonner, at least - - came splashing and bellowing out of the swamp. Gilbert quickly brought up the archaic Earth rifle, ramming a shell into the breech with the bolt-action loader. With almost the same motion he thrust the big, capable weapon into Mulveen's waiting hands and the hunter brought it to his shoulder without a moment to spare.

Actually, it was an adapted old big game rifle: the shells it fired were atomic. Standing his ground weaponless, Gilbert saw Mulveen's finger whiten on the trigger, saw the scale-hidden saurian grow immensely before them, heard its surprisingly high piping challenge, then saw and heard in one quick flash of suspended time the roar and smoke of the big rifle and the

sudden life-ending, sleek-scaled, column-legged death-rearing of the big saurian as it came upright, the piping a high death scream now, the small forelimbs tearing at air, the head with the very tiny hole between the eyes swaying as if drunk from side to side, the long, muscular, five-ton tail still thrashing in the swamp waters.

Then the saurian came down, crashing through the brakes. There was only a trickle of blood, but the bullet, like a Dum-Dum of three hundred years before, had exploded inside the monster's head, the minute atomic charge destroying everything within the thick bone walls of the skull but leaving skull and metal-tough skin intact.

Time flowed again. Mulveen returned the rifle to Gilbert and waded forward through the brackish water, his hipboots glisten-



ing.

"Beauty, isn't it?" Gilbert said with feigned professional enthusiasm. Mulveen needed the enthusiasm: the big humanoid from the Sirian system had been a grumpy, fussy, dissatisfied hunter throughout the safari.

"Don't try and dun me for a tip," Mulveen snapped. "You get paid whatever the Earth company pays you." He was a big, bald man with a florid face, an amazing girth of shoulders, a barrel chest and almost pipe-stem legs which seemed barely able to support his weight.

He reached the saurian's five-foot-long head and walked around it, muttering to himself. It was a prize specimen: a faudi reptile from Epsilon Aurigae III, bred here on Earth in the huge, planet-wide game-farm. It was the sort of specimen a big-game hunter would give his proverbial eyeteeth to own, but Mulveen did not look happy. He merely said:

"So this is a faudi."

"Want me to prepare the skull, sir?" Gilbert asked. Gilbert was eighteen, one of the youngest guides in the game area known as Lewsanna. His father had been a guide for the hunters from the outworlds, and his father's father. His father had died tracking: it was a good, clean death and Gil-

bert's father had never known poverty. That was the most an Earthman could expect, Gilbert thought without bitterness. For civilization had left Earth behind. Earth was in the backwaters of galactic trade. Earth was a game-preserve, with the great beasts of five dozen worlds brought to it and bred here for the hunters. It figured, naturally: you couldn't deny it. The outworlds were new; they were built as twenty-fourth century worlds should be built. Earth had been a world of ancient cities and meaningless ancient traditions. Earth was the logical place for the game farm. Earth, once the parent of all the galactic planets, reduced to a vacation spot for the very rich and the foolhardy . . .

"No," Mulveen said shortly. "Don't prepare the skull. I don't want the skull."

"But - -"

"Forget it, kid! I've hunted everywhere, wherever there's hunting left on the outworlds. When I grew jaded, they said come to Earth. Earth will be different, a hunter's paradise. You know what? It isn't different. It's the same."

"If you - -"

"You wouldn't understand kid. Well, let's go back to camp."

"The trophy - -" Gilbert began.

"Forget about the trophy, dam-

nitl!"

Gilbert followed Mulveen in silence to camp. The beaters and camp-boys had the evening meal prepared. The sun went down over the swamplands. Gilbert ate alone. He was a cut above the beaters and camp-boys, who had willingly surrendered their civilized birth-right, but he was several cuts above the hunter from the Sirian System.

MULVEEN DRANK heavily after dinner. Gilbert watched, not caring. Of course, that might make it dangerous when they hunted tomorrow: Mulveen's reflexes might be slower. Well, it had happened before.

"Boy!" Mulveen shouted, his voice thick with alcohol.

Gilbert trotted up obediently. "Sir?"

Mulveen smiled at him. "How would you like to earn five thousand credits?"

The answer was obvious: Gilbert made fifty credits a safari and sometimes went on as many as eight a year. Tips might bring the figure to an even five hundred credits a year. The figure Mulveen had named was ten year's work.

"I'm listening," Gilbert said.

Mulveen paced back and forth. Something had gotten to him. Hunters were like that, Gilbert

knew. They were capable of being possessed by an idea -- to the exclusion of all else. Gilbert had known hunters who, so possessed, had crossed a dozen light years.

"This planet," Mulveen said, "is real jerkwater, isn't it?"

"If you mean what I think, yes."

"What kind of law do you have?"

"Only what we need. It doesn't apply to extra-terrestrials."

"I thought so. Then an extra-terrestrial can commit any crime, any crime at all?"

Gilbert smiled grimly. "The Earth government -- such as it is -- considers extra-terrestrials too civilized to commit crimes. Also, extra-terrestrial hunters are responsible for most of Earth's income. This is a poor planet, Mr. Mulveen: civilization and then the attempt to keep up with civilization, has drained it."

"You know a lot for a kid."

"But that isn't what I'm getting five thousand credits for."

"Here," Mulveen said. He gave Gilbert one of the rifles, which had been cleaned during supper by the boys. He gave Gilbert a cartridge belt. "Here."

"I don't get it," Gilbert said.

"If no game on Earth holds a thrill for me, no game anywhere in the galaxy will. The five thou-

sand is yours if you do."

Mulveen took another drink, poured again, drank again, poured

"If I do what?"

"Get out of camp," Mulveen said. "I'll come for you in the morning."

"Come for me . . . ?"

"Come hunting, Gilbert. I've never hunted a human being before. On Earth I think I can get away with it. Well, can't I?"

Gilbert felt his pulses hammering. It was a drunken impulse, but Mulveen would go through with it. Gilbert was, despite his age, an expert guide. Mulveen was a crack hunter. Five thousand credits . . .

"To the death?" Gilbert asked.

"I wouldn't be playing games. Hell, yes."

"What if I get killed?"

"I'll put it in writing. The credits go to whatever person you name, in the event of your death."

Gilbert thought, *if I'm dead I won't need the credits, but if I live, if I win, those credits can buy me a new way of life . . .*

Five thousand credits . . .

"Can I fight back?" Gilbert heard himself asking.

"Does an animal? Of course you can. I'll also put in writing that you're not responsible in the event of my death. What do you say,

boy? What do you say?"

The swamp smell was thick on the still, heavy air of night. Insects buzzed and sawed off in the darkness. Mulveen was breathing heavily, impatiently, consumed by the fires of his idea. "Well?"

Gilbert broke the silence by holding the rifle up to the fire-light and bolting open the chamber. A fresh clip of ammo was in place.

"Didn't trust me?" Mulveen asked.

"Should I have?"

"Up to this minute, sure. But if your answer is yes, stop trusting me about anything. Because then you're on your own."

"For how long?" Gilbert asked. "A day?"

"Day, hell. Till I get you - - or you get me."

"And you'll have the beaters, the boys?"

"I paid for them, didn't I?"

Gilbert nodded. The night beckoned. He took his rifle and left camp. Mulveen wrote the agreement.

HE HAD NOT gone very far until he realized he was being followed. Already? he thought. He slipped silently off the trail and waited in the hot, sweat-producing darkness. Footsteps came along the trail. Gilbert saw a shadowy figure. Too small for

Mulveen.

Gilbert waited until the figure was abreast of him, then leaped.

They went down together in the mud. Gilbert's strong young muscles soon bested his opponent. He sat astride the unseen enemy's middle, his fists raised. "Surrender," he said.

"I surrender." Gilbert recognized Wenz's voice. Wenz was one of the beaters, an aloofly quiet boy who had kept to himself all during the safari, and who, Gilbert remembered, wore far too much clothing for the warm, sticky weather.

Gilbert got up, holding Wenz's elbow. Wenz said, "I heard what the master and you said. I came."

"But why?" Gilbert demanded. "Don't tell me you think I'll beat Mulveen?"

"No," said Wenz glumly. "Mulveen will win. But I was afraid."

"Of what?"

"Before the hunt this morning," Wenz said, "I went down to the stream to wash. I went alone."

"You always go alone," Gilbert said. "Sweating in your trousers and shirt no matter how hot it is."

"I have to," said Wenz.

"Have to?"

"Mulveen must have been suspicious. He followed me this morning. He saw. Tonight, he said. Tonight, Wenz. I had to come after

you, Gilbert."

"Tonight? Tonight what?"

"Mulveen saw me at the stream. This is a good way to make a living, Gilbert. Better than the other ways which are open to me. It is clean. It is decent, if degrading. I am a girl, Gilbert."

The news stunned him. A girl on safari - it was unthinkable. A girl, here

"But don't you have a family? A father or brother to provide for you?"

"No one. And I'm seventeen."

Seventeen. Wenz, by modern Earth standards gone primitive, was a woman.

Suddenly Gilbert tensed. He had heard something, a slight stirring in the dark swamp. Had Wenz been followed? Had this whole thing been elaborately planned by Mulveen, planned already in the morning, giving Wenz a reason to flee so that Wenz would flee to Gilbert at night and Gilbert would be caught and killed, legitimate quarry now, even before morning came?

Gilbert touched Wenz's lips with his fingers, hoping she would understand. He took her arm and led her silently from the swamp-trail.

They waited in among the wet creepers and tree-roots. Gilbert could feel Wenz's frightened

breathing as she leaned close to him. Whatever was pursuing them came on through the swamp. Once it floundered off the trail in darkness, splashing. It came on again. It paused, making a sniffing sound. An animal? A swamp-hog, perhaps? It sounded about the right size and bulk - - but so would a man

Gilbert brought the rifle up. A dark shadow stirred. "Stop!" Gilbert commanded. "You're in my sights. I can kill you."

"Gill!" a voice implored.

Gilbert dropped the rifle and let it swing on the shoulder thong.

"Arnaud," he said. "I could have shot you." Arnaud was the safari's chief beater and second in command to Gilbert.

"Mulveen told me what he was doing," Arnaud said. "I slipped out of camp."

"Why? You think Mulveen's going to lose?"

"With a dozen boys? No, I couldn't help him hunt you and kill you, that's all."

Arnaud touched his hand. They shook hands solemnly. It was an old gesture which Earthmen had never lost. Gilbert told Arnaud Wenzel was there, told Arnaud Wenzel was a girl.

"So there are three of us now," Arnaud said.

Gilbert nodded, then realized

the gesture was lost in darkness. He said, aloud, "We'd better put some distance between us and the camp."

They returned to the trail, plodded through the hot darkness. They walked for three hours and reached high ground as Gilbert had expected. "We can sleep here," he said. "But we'll have to be up before the sun. And we'll have to hunt for our food, too. Mulveen has provisions."

"Do you hate Mulveen?" Wenzel asked.

"For his proposition? No, why should I?"

"For his arrogance - -"

"He is an outworlder," Arnaud said.

"For what he wanted of you," Gilbert told Wenzel, "yes. But only for that."

"Do you have any plans?" Arnaud asked as they settled on the hillock.

Gilbert thought about it. They would need a plan, all right. It was what the animals of Earth lacked. The ability to plan, to rationally pursue their survival. And so the animals of Earth never had a chance.

"Mulveen will probably stalk us in the morning," Gilbert said. "We'll have to move fast. We'll be able to move faster than Mulveen because he'll be tracking us."

We can circle around behind him - - while he still believes himself behind us."

"It might work," Wenzel said, but not too optimistically.

"I don't see how it can miss!" Arnaud declared jubilantly. "Now let's get some sleep."

Gilbert was tired all at once. He felt the fatigue crawl through his muscles, dull his senses. He'd been on the go all day, and walking half the night. He drifted quickly into sleep and dreamed of a faucon reptile with the face of the hunter Mulveen, chasing them with tail-supported forty yard leaps

HE AWOKE in dim light. Like any experienced hunter, he awoke knowing exactly where he was and what was happening. The first thing he did was reach for his rifle. He had placed it at his side.

It was gone.

"Wenzel?" he called. No answer. "Arnaud?" Silence.

"Wenzel! Arnaud!" he shouted. He stood up quickly. He had the hillock of high, dry ground all to himself.

Distantly, he heard a scream. Wenzel's voice? he thought it was.

"Wenzel!" he shouted again, at the top of his voice.

The scream was faint. She might

have been calling his name. It might have been pure terror.

Arnaud, he thought. Arnaud has taken Wenzel. But why? Why? He was only a tracker, a beater. He couldn't provide for her. He wouldn't dare ravish her, for while there was no penalty for an outlaw, the penalty for an Earthman was severe.

Mulveen, he thought.

Mulveen's idea. Arnaud had never left Mulveen. Arnaud had come following Gilbert - - as Mulveen's man. Mulveen knew Wenzel was gone. Mulveen reasoned she had gone to Gilbert, further reasoned that Gilbert would protect her. Mulveen had sent Arnaud for her. And for Gilbert's rifle.

Gilbert was weaponless.

Five thousand credits, he thought. And my life.

Wenzel - - in Mulveen's possession. Or, in his possession when the traitor Arnaud brought her back to camp.

I can forget about her. I don't know her. Until last night I thought she was a boy, he told himself. I can flee and find a weapon somewhere.

Even while he told himself this, he was walking back along the trail. Wenzel had trusted him. Wenzel had fled to him at once. She had faith in him. A blind, almost childish faith, even if she hadn't

put it in words. She had come, and that was enough.

For the first time in his life, Gilbert felt anger. And a burning, consuming hate.

He loped with ground-consuming strides along the trail.

AN HOUR LATER, he heard the beaters. They were coming. They were coming for him.

They could have waited. But Mulveen was trying everything. Throw the works if you could, that's what the guides always said. Mulveen had Wenzl. It was a kind of bait and Gilbert might or might not rise to it. So the beaters were coming through the swamp.

Beaters. Yesterday, his men. Now, he was their quarry.

He crouched. In a moment he became part of the jungle, a shadow barely seen in the dim swamp, insubstantial, soundless. The beaters came on. If he were hunting a man-sized and weaponless animal, Gilbert thought, he would send the beaters through with staves and machetes

.....

He watched them come. He could name them, they came so close. They beat the undergrowth and the hanging creepers, vines and lianas with their clubs. Here and there he caught the gleam of a machete blade. If they spotted him they would make a rush, cutting off

his retreat, surrounding him on three sides and forcing him back along the trail toward where Mulveen was waiting, probably in a comfortable blind, with an atomic rifle.

Unless, right now, Mulveen was too busy with Wenzl

No, he told himself. It wouldn't be that way. Mulveen would want his triumph first. Wenzl would wait, a prisoner, for nightfall. But could he be sure?

The beaters went by, advancing through the swamp. One came so close, Gilbert could have reached out and touched him.

Gilbert stood up, stretching his stiff muscles. He waited an agonizing five more minutes, then set out along the trail.

A laggard beater materialized abruptly in his path. The machete blurred overhead, blade gleaming. The man's face showed recognition, but neither pity nor regret. He wouldn't kill Gilbert, naturally. He wanted Gilbert to run - back toward Mulveen.

Gilbert ducked under the upswinging arm. He drove his shoulder into the beater's midsection and felt the hard wall of muscle hold for a split-second, then yield. The beater jackknifed over. Gilbert let himself drop, grasped the beater's ankles and heaved. The beater sailed, yelling, over his head.

The beater landed face-first in the swamp and Gilbert dove after him. He found the machete-haft, twisted. The big-bladed weapon came free in his hand, but the beater lifted his head from the mud and cried:

"Mulveen! Mulveen, sir! Mulveen!"

Gilbert struck with the side of the machete blade, using it as a club. The beater subsided face down in the mud. Gilbert looked down at him, then scowled and turned him face-up in the swamp so he wouldn't drown.

Just then Mulveen's rifle cracked. The swamp-water swallowed the flat sound: there was no echo.

Mulveen heard the cry - - he was close. Perhaps close enough to see the white sheen of frothing water where the beater had fallen . . .

Quickly Gilbert slipped with his machete among the mangrove roots. He made his way through the thick tangle of gnarled roots and the slime of the swamp back in the direction from which the beater had come. Behind him he heard the clubs and machetes of the other beaters, returning now toward the rifle fire.

Up ahead somewhere unseen in the swamp Mulveen was waiting with his atomic rifle. Behind Gilbert, the beaters were coming.

Wenzi screamed, close by. With Mulveen? Gilbert crashed through the mangroves in that direction. Mulveen would hear him - - but wouldn't see him. The mangroves were a thick tangle of twisted trunks and roots. Mulveen would have no chance for a clear shot until almost the last moment.

Suddenly, Gilbert stopped dead in his tracks. Wenzi - - was she part of it? She could have fled to him, pretending. She could have been in league with Arnaud and Mulveen. There was no reason to believe otherwise. The trackers and beaters knew no loyalties. They were hardly more than animals. But somehow, Wenzi seemed different. As Gilbert thought himself different.

The thoughts raced through his mind. There were the continents of Earth, but the continents were game-reserves. The men were hardly more than game themselves. But there were the offshore islands, which had not been stocked with animals. It was rumored that another brand of men lived there, men who had fled from the continents, men determined to preserve their heritage and one day when they were strong enough return with it to the mainlands

With his five thousand credits, Gilbert could buy a boat, sail to the islands

Wenzi screamed again.

Mulveen's rifle roared. He was closer now. Wood splintered from the mangrove roots, peppering Gilbert. Heedless, he plunged on, impelled by the shouts of the beaters behind him. Grimly he thought: I'm giving Mulveen his money's worth. But that wasn't quite true. Mulveen would not really get his money's worth until Gilbert was dead.

THE RIFLE roared again and Gilbert thought he saw the muzzle-flash up ahead in the dark swamp. He ran splashing through the water and felt the spray as the rifle spoke once more. The minute atomic explosion went off in the water not ten yards from Gilbert. The concussion staggered him and he fell forward on his face, his head striking a mangrove root jarringly.

His senses swam. He heard a splashing, floundering sound. Mulveen. Mulveen was coming for him. He ducked behind a mangrove, waiting. Miraculously he still held the machete. He felt blood on his shoulder and chest, realized that he had probably fallen sideways across the blade.

Wenzi and Mulveen came through the swamp. Wenzi was in front. They were so close that Gilbert could see how the girl's hands were

secured behind her back, how Mulveen held a trailing rope, how the trailing rope was wrapped around Mulveen's thick waist so he could drop it when he had to and lift his rifle in both hands . . .

Gilbert came charging at them with his machete. With one swift stroke he parted the rope and shouted: "Run, Wenzi! Run!"

The rifle-muzzle came up. Gilbert dove face-down as the weapon roared. He felt the fierce blast of it, then was clawing through the mud at Mulveen's legs. Mulveen brought the rifle-butt crashing down. It jarred against Gilbert's shoulder, pushing him down into the water. He felt the machete drop from his fingers and from what seemed a long way off he heard Wenzi's scream although he was aware that the girl had not moved, was standing there awaiting the outcome.

The rifle pointed down at him. He reached up, tugging at the muzzle, pulling himself upright. Mulveen stumbled, cursing. Gilbert pulled the rifle-barrel into the mud and Mulveen came down with it on top of him. The beaters had reached them now, but the beaters were indifferent. Mulveen was the hunter: Mulveen had given his orders. But Gilbert was their chief guide and now it was a question of who was hunter and who hunted.

Their loyalty would belong to the victor

Mulveen's great weight came down on top of him. Mulveen had discarded the water-filled rifle. His hands closed on Gilbert's throat. His weight held Gilbert pinned In seconds - - certainly no more than minutes - - Gilbert would lose consciousness, the last air used up and self-poisoned and burning in his lungs, Mulveen's triumphant shouts ringing in his ears.

But it wasn't merely for himself.

And it wasn't merely for Wenzl.

It was for Gilbert of Lewsanna - - Earthman. And for a dream of the islands, and of Earthmen claiming their heritage again, if not in Gilbert's generation then in the one which followed

He scooped a handful of mud and brought his hand, ooze and all, against Mulveen's face. He found the eyes and clawed at them. He heard Mulveen bellowing for the beaters. But the beaters were impartial.

His thumbs were pressing on Mulveen's eyes now, but Mulveen's strong fingers were still on his throat. He felt something give. Mulveen went on bellowing, but also slowly choking the life out of him.

He shifted his hands to Mul-

veen's mouth. He pulled at the lips. He yanked with all his remaining strength and there was suddenly a pure animal scream of pain and a quick flow of hot blood across his hand and a release of the terrible pressure around his throat.

He got up. Mulveen's face was torn. Mulveen lifted his hand weakly. There was a knife in it. Gilbert slapped out at the hand and the knife dropped. Gilbert caught it, held the point at Mulveen's throat.

"I could kill you," Gilbert said.

Mulveen whined: "Don't! Please, you've earned the money. The money is yours!"

He could kill Mulveen, yes - - but would one of the Earthmen of the islands, the real Earthmen, have done that? They would have been content with victory - - and with shaming the outworlder Mulveen in front of the beaters and trackers.

"Don't come back to Earth," Gilbert said. "Ever. We don't want you here. Put that in writing too."

"I will. I will, I swear!" Mulveen was cowering.

Arnaud came to them, smiling. "Great work, Gil - - " he began. Gilbert hit him and the tracker went sprawling in the mud. He came up snarling but looked at Gilbert and muttered a curse and did nothing.

Later, a completely beaten Mulveen, his face swathed in bandages, counted out the credits. "Make it ten thousand," Gilbert told him. "Five thousand for Wenzl."

Mulveen counted out ten thousand credits. "But you'll have to lead us back to civilization," he said.

Gilbert looked at Arnaud. "He will," Gilbert told Mulveen. "I'm not a guide now. I'm a man. An

Earthman."

Mulveen looked at him. Mulveen did not smile. Something in Mulveen's face, in his eyes, spoke clearly of the day when Earthmen would regain their heritage. Mulveen was afraid.

Gilbert took Wenzl's hand and walked off into the swamp. They would buy a boat. And after that . . .

THE END

★ *Thought-Detector* ★

SCIENCE fiction readers are no strangers to the idea of "thought waves." Many stories have been written revolving around "mind shields", "thought screens" and all the paraphernalia associated with these concepts. The exciting point is that these ideas are likely to be valid!

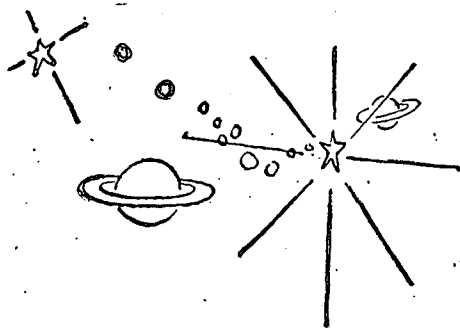
At present scientists know that thought and thinking are electrical in character. There is the famous encephalograph which is a machine for detecting "brain waves". These are simply electrical currents—quite feeble—which take place in our minds at all times, but most strongly when we are thinking intensively.

Now it is a basic fact that where there are electrical currents there are associated electric and magnetic fields which extend outward in proportion to the strength of the given current. Admittedly the currents of brain-waves are very weak. But still it should be possible to

detect them with sensitive enough apparatus.

Several scientists are working on this theory that the brain emits actual electromagnetic waves similar to radio waves. They are trying to devise extremely delicate and powerful detectors capable of picking-up and measuring these hypothetical waves. Of course once such a wave is detected it becomes a matter of routine to amplify it and then cause it to do useful work by operating a relay of some sort. This means that there is no theoretical reason why a thought could not close a switch!

If—and when—this happens the mind can be directly coupled to a machine, say, an electric typewriter (or anything else) and direct thoughts can be recorded. It sounds fantastic but at the rate science moves today it is dangerous to be conservative. Someday thought-waves are going to be found and put to work—that's a prediction!



LUTHER
SCHEFFY

"May I see you alone a minute, Joe?"

John Harper's Insight

by

Dick Purcell

Can the mind breach time? Harper was sure he had caught a news item that would change his life. Ironically he caught only a part of it . . .

THEY THOUGHT he was insane. And with good reason.

Here was a man who'd spent his life in a machine shop coming down one morning to say in all apparent sincerity, "I've decided to be a concert pianist."

Jan Grabowski, on the turret lathe grinned and said, "Sure, John. They'll bring in a grand piano and you can practice between cuts."

"They laughed when I sat down to the piano," someone bellowed and there was general laughter and the thing was forgotten.

But later, when he told the boss he was quitting, they looked at each other in amazement. He'd evidently gone mad and that was no laughing matter because they liked John.

Sam Paine, harrassed plant manager still found time to be human. When he discovered John was ser-

ious, he sat down and gave him half an hour, figuring he could find the quirk and straighten the man out. As they went to his office, he swiftly classified his employee: John Harper — 33 years old — introverted — intelligent over and above his job. Harper seemed to be without ambition, though and Sam wondered about this but had never had time to talk with him much.

After the half hour was up, Paine sighed and let him go. Obviously the concert pianist gag was a coverup for something else — some fancied wrong — perhaps plain restlessness.

Alone, Paine went back over the conversation, intrigued by John Harper's strange determination.

"This talk about being a concert pianist is a gag of course, isn't it, John?"

"No, Mr. Paine."

"But man — you're too old to start a thing like that. You never in your life studied music did you?"

"No, sir."

"Then let me tell you — first, in a thing like that, you've got to have talent. Have you got talent?"

"I don't know."

It had seemed ridiculous, seriously pinpointing things that should have been obvious. "Well let's say you have — just for argument's sake. All right — talent has to be caught early and nourished — like a seed — get what I mean? A man can't start at your age and get any place in a game the experts started in at eight or nine — as children."

"You may be right, Mr. Paine, but maybe that doesn't apply to me. Maybe it does, of course, but I've got to find out."

Sam Paine gave up. He told John Harper his job would be waiting when he wanted it again — even gave him an extra week's pay, but that was to salve his conscience because he felt he should bring in a psychiatrist at company expense to see what had gone wrong with Harper. Then he shrugged and put the thing out of his mind. Funny things happen in this day and age, he thought.

The trouble was, he didn't real-

ly know, John Harper. No one did. A bachelor, Harper lived alone, thought alone — and suffered alone. He hated the futility of his life, the work he was doing, the passing of unfulfilled days and nights. He felt a strong pull of destiny he could neither explain nor deny; an unreasoning certainty that he, John Harper was meant for better things; or perhaps a single better thing.

He lived with this certainty while the unfulfilled days and nights piled up. Until the misery became a pain and possibly demanded some sort of recognition by its very existence.

At any rate, the morning of the day he quit his job, he had just awakened to the old familiar dread of the day ahead; a dread almost akin to a physical sickness. He was sure he did not go back to sleep, but he clearly saw, on the floor within range of his eyes, a television set. The picture was bright and clear — a famous newscaster with the smile known from coast to coast and the rat-tat-tat voice that was his trademark.

He was beginning his broadcast with the standard opening line: *"And now, folks — what's been going on in the world? John Harper, the great concert pianist — the man who brought long-hair music into the home — the man*

loved by millions, will — "

The voice and the image vanished. Then the set faded, and John Harper lay tense in the bed in his shoddy little room. But a different John Harper now. In an instant he became a dedicated man knowing he had been building up to this moment for years.

This was the incident Sam Paine did not know of; nor did anyone except John Harper himself. He had a little money saved up — a few hundred dollars — and he went straight to a music school. His difficulty was that he could not camouflage his ambition — or rather his intent — and after stating exactly what he proposed to do, he was turned down by five reputable maestros in a row.

So he gave up seeking instruction and rented a piano. He was fortunately situated in that his room lay at the back of the resident hotel where he lived and the walls were as thick as the building was old and shoddy looking.

He bought some instruction books at a second hand store and went to work. He practiced, plowing doggedly through the intricacies of the notes and scales until his money ran out. Then he got a job washing dishes and practiced all night.

Until he was able to present himself again at a music school where

the maestro was, fortunately, both honest and possessed of a conscience. His honesty said, send this man away. But John Harper had just enough pathetic skill and foggy talent that the instructor's conscience dictated the final policy.

"I will teach you," he said. Adding to himself, *It will be an act of charity. Nothing more.* He would have been astounded, however, had he known that four short months before John Harper had not known even the scale.

John told no one this. He told no one anything. But he applied himself to the piano with a single-mindedness that made a fanatic seem changeable as the wind by comparison.

And soon, Professor Heinrich, he of the conscience, was confronted with something he could not understand. Genius was blooming and functioning before his eyes.

THE REST is history. It is told in hushed tones how this sad-faced, middle-aged man with no background — he was called "The Man From Nowhere," by certain romantically inclined critics — gave his first recital in New York City. It was given exactly seven years from the day he told Sam Paine, "I'm quitting to become a concert pianist."

The television networks found

him quickly and he rocketed to fame by giving classical music an interpretation that made it understood and loved by millions.

It was said that John Harper gave more musical pleasure to the world in his brief two-year career than had any other genius in a natural span.

But of course, the seven years had taken their toll. The punishment of learning would have killed

a far younger and stronger man than John Harper. So, after a tragically brief time at the top of his ladder, John Harper was the subject of a newscast.

By a famous newscaster with the smile famous from coast-to-coast and a rat-tat-tat voice that was his trademark.

But not smiling as he finished his first item. " — *be buried tomorrow in New York City.*"

THE END



"I never realized before how insignificant you are!"

Day Of The Comet

by

Ivar Jorgensen

When the world you live on is about to be destroyed in a matter of hours, petty squabbles no longer seem important; only Time—and regret!

SO FAR AS the public was concerned, the comet was discovered at 10:00 a. m. on a Friday morning; just when Frank and Dee Allison were in the midst of their bitterest domestic quarrel. Dee had just spoken through clenched teeth:

"I never knew I could hate a person the way I hate you."

"I consider that an honor!" Frank snapped back.

Then the music on the radio was cut off and the announcement was made - - - in the calm, impersonal voice of the announcer that gave it a flavor of grotesque unreality . . .

" - - - and so, although the discovery of the celestial interloper was made by astronomers some time ago, the announcement was delayed until all doubt as to its orbit had been dispelled. Thus, a direct and dismal statement be-

comes a matter of necessity - - - the earth is doomed - - - "

Frank and Dee stared mutely at one another, trying to comprehend. "It's some kind of a gag," Frank said.

Dee shook her head. "No - - - that was John Kalmus, the Green Network commentator who cut in. He wouldn't be a party to any hoax."

Frank knew this of course, but the destruction of the world was a pretty big lump to swallow in a matter of seconds. They continued to stare at each other, taking the rest of the story into their numbed minds. The end would come at exactly 1:42 on Sunday. Prior to that time, there would be vast weather disturbances and tidal catastrophies the world over. But these would be far milder than what would ordinarily be expected because the comet was moving at



such a tremendous rate of speed. There would be no long-drawn out suffering.

"At least that's a blessing," Dee said.

"Uh-huh. Say—I'll bet the churches will be crowded."

"No doubt." Dee paused, and added, "How long since we've been to church, Frank?"

THERE HAD BEEN a cabinet meeting and now the President of the United States was seated alone in his study. He picked up his phone and asked, "How about that call to the Kremlin? Why the delay?"

The operator said, "The Premier was busy on the phone - - - not taking any calls; but it seems he was trying to get through to you. May I connect him, sir?"

"By all means."

The normally harsh voice of the Russian Premier was oddly quiet and pensive: "Mr. President?"

"Mr. Premier. I was trying to get through to you."

"They told me. How - - - how are things there? How are your people taking it in the United States?"

"Very well. They are stunned, naturally, and I'm sure quite a few of them don't believe it. It will take a little time."

The Russian Premier chuckled with a note of wistfulness. "That's exactly what they will have - - - very little time."

"And your people - - - ?"

"We haven't told them. We thought it best."

The President sighed. "We stick to our ideologies to the very end, don't we?"

"Policy can't be changed overnight. Yet great strides can be made."

"I don't think I understand you."

"I'll try to clarify. We finished our public statement Monday, setting down our position on The Stockholm Conference last month."

"The conference was a great disappointment to me - - - to you also, I imagine."

"Yes, and our public statement was, well, pretty bleak, but I'm changing it. I'm in the middle of rewriting it now."

"I'd like to sit down with you and perhaps readjust some of our own demands."

"I'd like to have you."

"No time now, of course."

"No, in fact the rewriting may seem futile to you but it gives me great satisfaction. A nice way to end a political career."

"Why don't you call me back and read it to me when you've finished?"

"I'll do that. Goodbye Mr. President."

* * *

Frank and Dee Allison walked hand in hand down the street. Dee had been crying but now her tears had been dried and her expression was calm. There was a wistful light in her eyes. "It could have been so much different, Frank."

"Yes darling. My fault. It was my damn temper."

"But I was always ready to

snarl back. A wife's job is to - - -

He squeezed her hand. "Are you afraid, baby?"

"No - - - no. I won't be afraid as long as you're there to hold my hand."

He put his arm around her shoulders and drew her close and they walked with the other people toward the Church.

* * *

The President of the United States put through a call to the Premier of Russia. Connections clicked into place across half a world and the Russian operator's voice came through warm and cordial. "Of course, Mr. President. The Premier's wire is always open to you. I'll ring him."

The phone was lifted instantly. "Mr. President! How nice of you to call!"

"Our previous conversation set me thinking, Mr. Premier. I want to be a part of your inspiring idea. So I'm rewriting our own statement and I suggest we make a joint public release. I think it will help the people of the world to face the end with greater dignity. The *knowing* - - - I think - - - will help."

"I'm sure it will. How soon will your draft be finished?"

"Can you give me another two hours?"

"Of course. Ring me when you're

ready. Perhaps we can set up an international television hookup and appear together."

"I'm sure we can."

* * *

Frank and Dee Allison came out of church bringing some of the peace and the strength with them. Dee said, "I'd like to see my mother for a little while before - - - before - - -"

Frank nodded. "Of course. And I think you should drop in on her alone."

"Oh, no - - - I - - -"

"A goodbye like this one should be said alone. You go up. I'll give you fifteen minutes and then call for you."

Dee's eyes were misty. "You're so understanding. Oh, why couldn't we have - - -"

Frank grinned. "Come on, angel. Heads up. Eyes bright."

They walked up the street, others around them going quietly about their business. The people were very calm.

THE CONFERENCE of astronomers and scientists realized their ghastly blunder at 11:59 a. m. For a long moment, there was stunned silence in the room. None of them could believe that such a progressive series of errors could have been passed from man to man and been added to by

each. Through every mind went the dread of what would come out of this. In the future it would be called the greatest hoax of all time. There would be gigantic investigations. Possibly a goat would have to be found. The world would never believe the truth.

"We might as well make the announcement," someone said.

"You make it," another scientist said. "I'm leaving for the North Pole."

* * *

Frank Allison heard the announcement from a loudspeaker in a store window on his sixth trip around the block. He'd been walking slowly, deep in his own thoughts and regrets - - - giving Dee a little more time with her mother. Then - - -

"- - - so the great danger is passed, ladies and gentlemen. The why and the wherefore of it is not known at this time. We are only sure of one thing: The comet will swing away into space. Rumor has it that the size of the invading body was what threw our scientists off. But whether the earlier announcement was sincere or merely a cruel joke will not be known immediately. The main thing is to be thankful that an error existed - - - whatever its cause - - -"

Frank straightened his shoulders, turned and started briskly up

the street.

* * *

The President of the United States put a call through to the Russian Premier. He awaited expectantly with the phone in his hand. But the connections slipped into place slowly and five minutes later a voice came across half a world. "The Premier is busy. Please inform the President of the United States that the Premier is engaged. Inform the President that I am able to connect him with the Premier's secretary. Ask him if that will be satisfactory."

The frost in the voice seemed to chill the President's ear. "I will talk to the Premier's secretary."

The Secretary's voice was careful, guarded. "May I help you, Mr. President?"

"Perhaps you can. I had a conversation with the Premier a little over an hour ago. We were planning a joint statement - - - a joint television appearance."

The secretary's voice stiffened. "I'm sorry, but I know of no such statement nor of any such plans on the part of the Premier."

"May I speak to the Premier?"

"I'm sorry. The Premier has left on an extended vacation."

"I'm sorry too," the President said, and cradled the phone.

* * *

Dee Allison sat tight-eyed staring out the window. Her handkerchief was balled into a wad in her hand. "He's so cruel - - - so thoughtless," she said.

Her mother regarded her with resignation. "What do you want me to tell him when he comes?"

"Tell him I never want to see him again!"

* * *

Frank Allison got as far as the lobby of the building in which Mrs. Gregg, Dee's mother, lived. He raised his hand and his finger was inches from the bell. Then he doubled the hand into a fist and thrust it into his pocket. "The

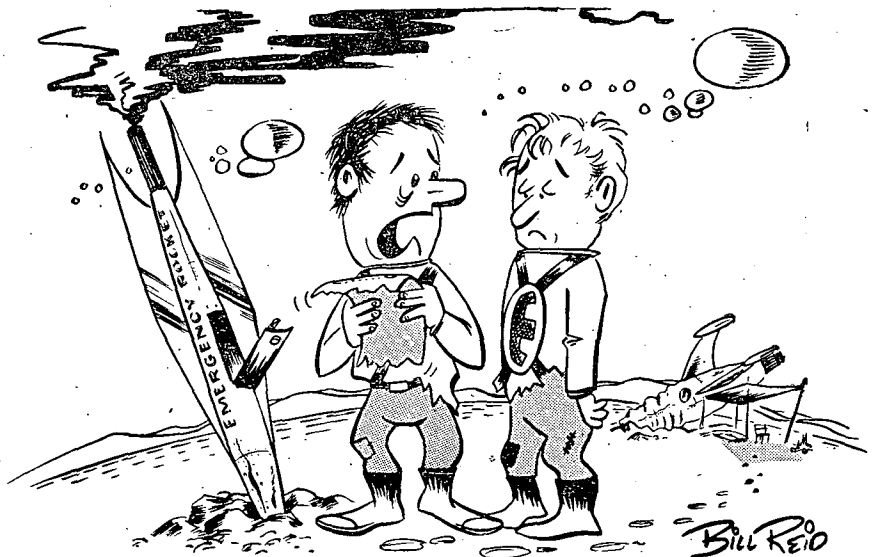
hell with it!" he growled. "If she wants to see me, she knows where to find me." He turned and strode out of the building.

* * *

THE PRESIDENT of the United States had sat staring into space for a long time. A sound caused him to look up. His secretary stood by the desk. "Yes?"

"This new statement you just prepared, Mr. President. I'm not entirely clear on how you plan to use it - - - what should I do?"

"Tear it up," the President said wearily, "and throw it in the wastebasket. Things are now back to normal."



"It's from us!"

CENTAURI VENGEANCE

by

Darius John Granger

George Haven was the most powerful man in the galaxy; now he had returned to Centauri and he was afraid — for his past was staring at him!

HAVEN BEGAN to realize it was a mistake returning to Centauri with his wife even before they reached their hotel. For Louise Haven said, as soon as the Centaurian porters had taken their baggage at the starport with cold, aloof correctness:

"Why, George! They don't seem to like you. I thought you would be a hero to them, from what you told me."

George Haven said nothing. He was a big, powerful-looking man in his late thirties. He was expensively dressed and he had taken the most expensive suite in Alpha City's best hotel and he had an expensive, young, and beautiful wife.

He thought: Today I'm one of the most powerful men in the stellar confederacy. What does she expect, that I'll win a popularity contest too? Well, I guess she'll

learn eventually what makes an important man truly important. Could you sum it up in a word, in a single clearly understood word? he wondered. He decided that you could. The word was ruthless.

They swept into the hotel with their train of attendants and were received with the same aloof correctness. Haven watched with satisfaction while Louise removed her Sirian furs. Louise was something to look at, all right, but so were the furs. They'd cost Haven plenty and there was probably a trail of blood and tears behind them on Sirius III, for the animals whose coats they were, Haven knew, were ferocious.

It was very cold outside, as it always was on Centauri VII. The small, blue-skinned hotel manager said, in crisp, perfect English:

"The others are already here, Mr. Haven. They are waiting."



Of course the others had already arrived, Haven thought. You had to keep people waiting. Let them know their own importance didn't add up to a hill of beans.

"It's a beautiful suite, George," Louise Haven said after they had

taken the pneumotube to their floor and entered their suite through the iris door. "At least the Centaurians saved the best for us."

"I'll always get the best for you, baby," Haven said, and took this beautiful young woman who

had been his wife for exactly two months - - long enough to reach Centauri - - into his arms and kissed her.

Was there something unexpectedly stiff and cold about Louise's response? Haven did not know; he wondered if he had imagined it. Was the coldly correct behavior of the Centaurians getting on his nerves?

"You know," Louise said breathlessly, "it's still a little hard to realize I'm married to a legend. Mrs. George Haven. Mrs. Most - Important - Man - in - the - Galaxy. And it's even harder to believe you got your start right here on Centauri VII. Tell me about it, George."

"Man's got to get his start somewhere," Haven said, surprised that it sounded defensive. "Besides, that's why we've come to Centauri."

It was - - and it wasn't. Haven's first big success, almost fifteen years ago, had been here on cold, bleak Centauri VII. Haven and a man, named Drexell Tolliver - - who had died here in Centauri - - had discovered a uranium mine which had dwarfed all the remaining lodes on Earth. With that discovery as a stepping-off point, Haven now owned some fifty percent of all the producing uranium mines in the stellar con-

federacy. And since stellar civilization was an atomic civilization, Haven could buy and sell politicians across the length and breadth of the inhabited galaxy.

But, he thought now as Louise went into the next room to prepare for the reunion party with the Earthmen and Centaurians who had worked under Haven and Drexell Tolliver fifteen years ago, he hadn't been able to buy as much as a porter on Centauri VII. Damn them! he thought for the hundredth time. Damn the fantastically decadent Centaurians, anyway! They never told lies. It was biologically - - or psychologically, he didn't know which - - impossible for a Centaurian to tell a lie. On the other hand, Haven remembered from bitter experience, a Centaurian could refuse to answer you altogether. That was usually their way out. They were the most close-lipped people in the galaxy. There were no courts of law on Centauri: there could not be, for no one would testify against anyone else. The only retributive system they had was that of vendetta. It almost seemed incredible to Haven that Centauri VII had been admitted into the stellar confederacy at all.

Haven showered and dressed and wondered about the reunion.

It had been his own idea. For here on Centauri was the one mistake which could ruin Haven, here where there were no politicians to be bought. The thought of it had weighed on Haven for fifteen years. It seemed safely hid, his secret. Hadn't fifteen years elapsed? But still, there was no predicting the Centaurians. No predicting them at all.

The reunion was a necessity, assuming Haven had to come. For, if you couldn't buy Centaurians, you could at least buy Earthmen. And Haven might need help.

He chuckled. He hadn't seen anything of these men for fifteen years, but he'd been paying them off regularly, like clockwork. Blackmail? It was hardly blackmail. Haven knew what they knew. Haven had offered them money almost from the beginning, and all of them had accepted. Ruthless, Haven thought again. In their own small way, these half dozen men were ruthless, too. Failures in life, of course, except for the money Haven paid them every month. But ruthless.

"Ready, George?" Louise asked.

Haven looked her up and down slowly. She was ravishingly beautiful. She was George Haven's property. He had made her what she was. He didn't even know her

background, had purposely not delved into it. Forget about the past, he'd told her on the eve of their marriage. It's the future which counts. The future . . .

"THE FUTURE!" toasted Allen Vorhees, lifting his glass of Centaurian liquor. "To all our futures."

The six Earthmen who knew Haven's secret drank with secret smiles. The smiles were for Louise - - Louise who apparently knew nothing, Louise who looked up to her husband with the blind faith of a naive young girl.

Haven raised his own glass. "May the future treat all of you as well as the past fifteen years have," he said, and drank. The smiles faded around the table. They'd drink to that, all right, Haven thought. But they didn't like the idea.

A Centaurian waiter shuffled in with the first dinner course. Haven felt a mounting impatience. He wished the banquet was over already. He wished he could start planning what he had to do. He'd come to Centauri with no specific plan. He only knew that Drexell Tolliver's fifteen-years-frozen corpse was still waiting here on Centauri VII, to ruin him someday if he wasn't careful. Yes, Haven thought. I killed him. I murd-

ered Drexell Tolliver. But it was for the good of the whole galaxy, couldn't they see that? Tolliver was an idealist, had wanted to give the huge uranium lode as a gift to the decadent Centaurians, who once had possessed a fine atomic civilization but had lost it a thousand years before Earthmen took to the stars. Then Drexel Tolliver said, they could lease the mine back and work it. The galaxy would get its uranium, Centauri VII would get much-needed galactic credits, and the partnership of Tolliver-Haven would still run the mine.

But this way, the way it worked out, thought Haven, the galaxy gets all the uranium from me. The whims of the strange Centaurians didn't matter. It was for the good of the galaxy, wasn't it? Haven smiled, remembering. Galaxy, hell. Why didn't he admit it, at least to himself? It was for the good of George Haven. And in the process, in bringing about that good, Drexell Tolliver had had to die.

"... go out and visit the old mines," Angus MacCready was saying.

The last course was served. Vorhees suggested they could start for the mines in the morning, and they all agreed. Even Louise seemed fascinated by the idea, and this surprised Haven. Louise had never

showed much interest in his enterprises -- except, now that he thought of it, for the Centaurian mine.

Out there, Haven thought. A hundred miles from nowhere in the high ice mountains north of this city, there is a glacier. The ice is crystal clear, astonishingly clear. And there, entrapped in the ice and perfectly preserved by it for all time and perfectly visible too, was Drexell Tolliver's body. Haven had, fifteen years before, melted the ice with a heat blaster and dropped Tolliver's body in. Then the ice had frozen over. For fifteen years, except when it snowed -- and it did not snow often, despite the cold, on Centauri VII -- the corpse had been perfectly visible for whoever wanted to see it. Fortunately, the viewers had only been Centaurians, and the Centaurians never bore testimony against one another, nor against outworlders, either.

Now he had to reach that body, had to hide it some way, with the help of these six men he'd been paying off for fifteen years because they'd been working for him and Tolliver and knew what he knew . . .

"I'd just love to go out there," he heard Louise saying.

"No, Louise," he said firmly. "I don't think you'd like it." Cold.

Nothing to see, really. Why don't you just stay in the hotel when we get started in the morning?"

"But I insist," Louise said, smiling at him sweetly.

"Let the little lady go," Mac-Cready said, smiling blandly.

Before Haven could answer, the little Centaurian waiter came by. "Glacier move," he mumbled.

"What did you say?" said Haven, startled.

"Nothing," said the Centaurian, and shuffled from the room. Haven got up and started after him, but saw Louise watching. He settled back and waited uncomfortably through the small talk of the reunion. It did not break up until the early hours of the morning and Haven went directly to their suite with Louise.

"No nightcap?" she asked him.

"Need plenty of sleep for the morning. But Lou, honey, I still don't think you ought to go."

"I'm going, George. That's all. It's the beginning of the George Haven legend, and I want to see it. Can you blame me?"

Haven had to admit that he could not. They went up to the suite, where Haven undressed and got into bed and pretended to fall asleep quickly. After what seemed a very long time to him he heard Louise's regular breathing.

"Sleeping honey?" he whispered.

No answer.

Haven got up quietly and dressed in the dark. He tiptoed to the door, looked back once, listened. Louise was still breathing regularly. Even before the reunion celebration was over, Haven had made up his mind. If Louise was going out there with him and the others in the morning - - and apparently she was - - then Haven had to go out there first, in the darkness, alone if necessary, to see what he could do about the body. . . .

HE CLOSED the door softly behind him and stepped into the dim, night-lit hallway. He almost bumped into a small figure crouching there and jerked away from it with a startled exclamation.

It was the little Centaurian waiter.

Haven grabbed the collar of his tunic. "All right," he said. "All right, you're just the man I'm looking for. What did you mean, glacier move?"

"Glacier move. You know. You know!" The Centaurian offered a tentative smile.

"No, damn you, I don't know!" Haven whispered furiously, dragging the Centaurian into the stairwell.

"Glacier on mine then. Glacier not on mine now. All city know."

"Then where is it?"

"Glacier is river of ice. Glacier flow. Glacier one, two miles from city now."

"*That* glacier?" demanded Haven, horrified at the thought that Drexell Tolliver's body was within a mile or two of five million people, even if they were Centaurians.

"That glacier, yes."

"Take me there," commanded Haven, all but strangling the little Centaurian with his big hands.

"I take you," the blue man managed. His azure skin had gone a pale sky blue with fright. They're all the same, thought Haven. If you can't buy them you can scare the hell out of them.

"Then let's get started," Haven said.

A TEAM of six-legged creatures drew the ice-sled silently through the night. They climbed steadily into the ice hills. Centauri had set, but little Proxima, Centauri VII's tiny second sun, was on the horizon and gave dusky light perhaps twice the brightness of Earth night at full moon. The little waiter, whose name Haven didn't know, drove the team in utter silence. The runners slid across the ice with scrapings and whisperings. The long, surprisingly bright night shadows fled before them. Haven was wrapped to the

ears in furs and it was cold here in the ice hills, but he sweated with impatience. Sure, he told himself. You'll find the body. You'll see the body. But what will you do then.

It took hardly more than moments to reach the huge, amazingly transparent glacier. Fifteen years, thought Haven. Fifteen years is nothing to this river of ice. Fifteen hundred years - - - and it will still hold Drexell Tolliver's body, perfectly preserved. Drexell Tolliver's body, the wound inflicted by Haven's knife, the knife still there, in the dead man's side with Haven's fingerprints on the haft because for the first and only time in his life Haven had been frightened and thus careless . . .

Haven climbed off the sled and carefully skirted the upper edge of the crevasse he remembered so well. The bottom was in shadow. It was two hundred feet down, certainly, if not more. Haven shuddered. It would have been so easy for a man to slip. Why hadn't he thought of that, fifteen years ago? The crevasse had been here. He could have pushed Tolliver, instead of knifing him.

The waiter led the way at a brisk pace, his animal-pad-soled boots holding on the slick ice, as Haven's did. Finally, the waiter

held up his hand:

"Here," he said. "Here Tolliver."

"You know?" Haven gasped. He had never doubted it for a minute, but somehow the two words - - here Tolliver - - had nevertheless startled him.

"All Alpha City know," said the native, stepping aside as Haven peered down through the utterly clear ice.

The body seemed very small and lonely and far away. It was there as it had been there and as it always would be there and as it had haunted Haven's sleep for fifteen years.

Haven probed his mind for ideas. There had to be something . . .

A heat blaster, he thought. I can go back to town and get a heat blaster and melt it free again and then - -

But the little native had to die. True, he was only one of millions who had apparently seen the body, but he had taken Haven here, and if ever he could be brought to a stellar confederacy court to testify, and if it could be proved that the site of the mine, fifteen years ago, had been galactic and not Centaurian territory, and if he could be made to testify because, after all, he was not on Centauri and not subject to the Centaurian

mores, then Haven was finished.

Haven removed the hand-stunner from his furs and pointed it at the native's back.

"Hold it, George! Don't move!"

He dropped the gun in his surprise. It was Louise's voice.

Runners slid whisperingly across the ice. A sled came up. Louise stood in it, a stunner in her own hand. She looked at him as the sled came to a stop. Her face was grim.

"Louise," Haven said accusingly. "You followed me from the hotel. But why - - why?"

"Because I had to find out what you had to find out. Because you told me to be ruthless, George, remember? You always told me you had to be ruthless to get anyplace. So I was ruthless too. I married you."

"Ruthless - - marrying me? I don't understand."

"You never looked into my past, George. That suited me fine. Well, come on. Get on this sled now! I'm taking you back to Alpha City. We're getting in touch with the Galactic representative to see if you can be indicted for Drexell Tolliver's murder."

"But you - -"

Just then the small native came up with Haven's stunner. "You came almost too late, Miss Tolliver," he said.

Tolliver, thought Haven. Tolliver! "Tolliver!" he shouted, and his voice echoed from the ice hills and came back, booming, to him. "Tolliver!"

And calmly, Louise told him: "I am Drexell Tolliver's daughter. You fool, George. You fool. The others were here, but they never knew. Not Vorhees, not Mac-Cready, not any of them. Sure, they took your money. They were curious, but why should they say no? You built the whole thing up in your mind. It was your own private nightmare. You never would have been found out if you hadn't come here. If you hadn't dreamed up this reunion, if you hadn't married Drexell Tolliver's daughter."

ter."

Haven heard her voice, but hardly heard the words. He began to run. Soon he was running very fast. He did not look back. He heard the bark of her stunner and saw the raw streaks of energy rip by him in the night. Run, he thought. You have to run now. You never had to run before, but you can do anything you have to do, can't you?

He ran faster and faster. The night and the ice swept by. This time he did not see the crevasse. He ran right up to the lip without a sound, into the death-trap he should have prepared for Drexell Tolliver fifteen years before.

THE END

★ *A Shortage Of The Future* ★

AMERICANS give an enormous amount of lip service to the magic name of "science" But it seems that lip service is not enough.

The facts: Science and applied science (engineering) make not only for the good things in life, but the very protection of the American way. Progress requires scientists and engineers *now* more than ever.

Fact: Russia produces 50,000 engineers every year—and they go through a five year education at least. America produces thirty-thousand engineers per year—at four

years of study.

Fact: Fewer and fewer young men and women seem to be interested in mathematics and physics — they rarely take these subjects even in high school.

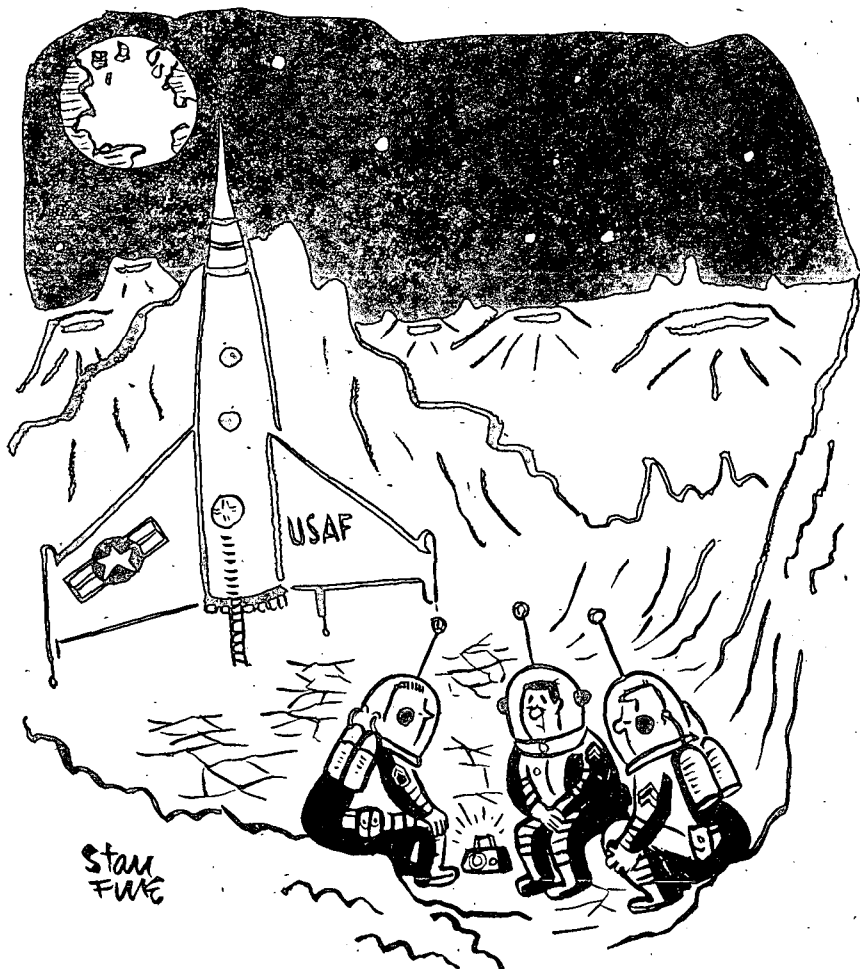
Question: What is to be done?

Answer: Every American who is aware of this state of affairs—and there are a lot of them—should make every effort he is capable of, of interesting his children, friends' children, of the fascinating work technology is, of its rewards, of its prestige.

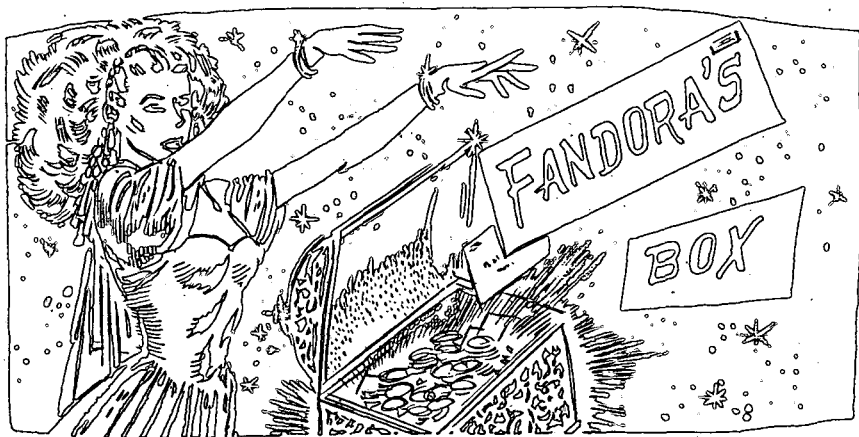
Surveys show that American

children think of scientists as "double-doomed creeps"—a quote—in smelly laboratories, without honor, without rewards. The heroes of our kids should not be the entertainers,

nor the businessman — but the scientists and engineers who have made their way of life what it is. This polemic is intentional—a crisis exists!



"... this program is being carried to our armed forces abroad ..."



Conducted by Robert Bloch

ONE OF THE busiest men in the science-fiction field today is an ex-hermit named Larry Shaw.

As editor of a sports-car publication, Shaw spends all day slaving over a hot-rod magazine. In addition, he is the guiding genius of a science-fiction prozine called (if Mr. Hamling will pardon the expression) INFINITY.

You'd think this would be enough to keep his hands full, but no - - in recent months Shaw has also found time to marry Lee Hoffman. Furthermore, he and his bride made a trip to England and attended the Kettering Convention, or as Anglo-fans would have it, the Annual Snogfest.

And that's not all - - Mr. Shaw has managed, in addition, to write a letter to me. His message reads in part (the clean part, that is) as follows:

"Dear Editor:

I enclose some questions for the question and answer section of Fandora's Box. I know you didn't know there was a question and answer section, but you're not going to let Willy Ley make a piker out of you, are you?"

Whereupon he makes with the questions, which I am going to reproduce here, together with my own answers. Bear in mind, however, that my answers aren't necessarily correct. You may have other solutions to Mr. Shaw's queries. If so, why not mail them direct to him, together with a time-bomb?

Here are Shaw's questions, and my own replies.

DEAR MR. BLOCH:

I READ IN MR. LEY'S COLUMN, IN ANOTHER MAGAZINE, WHERE SOMEBODY ASKED HIM WHAT ROCKETS PUSH AGAINST AND HE SAID THEY

DON'T PUSH AGAINST ANYTHING. SO I STOOD IN FRONT OF ONE, AND IT SURE AS HECK PUSHED ME. CAN YOU STRAIGHTEN ME OUT?

-BEWITCHED, BOTHERED
AND BESMATTERED

My own opinion is that it would take a licensed chiropractor to straighten you out now. In fact, you're lucky you weren't blown to bits. This actually happened to an uncle of mine: he exploded, and his fragments were scattered all over the city. Of course, he had always wanted to be a man about town.

DEAR MR. BLOCH:

I HAVE AN ENCHANTED
DUPLICATOR. WHAT DO I DO
NOW?..

-CLAUDE

Use it for the purpose for which it was intended, of course - - reproduction.

DEAR MR. BLOCH:

WHO SAWED MY BOAT?

-COURTNEY

This is one of the two great unsolved mysteries of fandom: the other being what stunted Don Ford's growth. For years, fanzines have echoed this plaintive query, and a number of solutions have been offered. Some say it was Yngvi (the louse) and others claim Courtney sawed it himself, for egoboo. My own belief is that it was sawed by the same character who stole Tucker's nine of clubs.

DEAR MR. BLOCH:

IF IT TRUE THAT THERE IF
NO FANTA CLAUF, AF MY
LITTLE FRIENDF KEEP TELL-
ING ME?

-VIRGINIA

Why of course there is a Santa Claus, Virginia! And next Christmas, you write and ask him to bring you some false teeth that don't slip.

DEAR MR. BLOCH:

IF GLYCERIC ACID IS THE
FIRST PRODUCT OF THE UP-
TAKE OF CARBON DIOXIDE IN
PHOTOSYNTHESIS WHAT IS
THE COMPOUND FROM WHICH
IT IS FORMED?

-WILLY

Through the ages, this Secret Wisdom has been known only to a few. Now, for a limited time only, it is available to cultured adult students and members of the medical profession in a plain sealed envelope, including our special bonus offer of 400 all different cartoon-booklets. As a special bonus, the first twenty people who reply will receive a portion of the dismembered body of Larry Shaw . . .

So much for our question-and-answer section. But before turning to this month's selection of fan magazines, let's consider the matter of fan organizations; specifically, the University of Chicago Science Fiction Society.

At this writing I have just returned from a visit to this group. While the Anglofans gathered in Kettering over the weekend of April 1st, and a special unit of West Coast fans held a Relaxicon, the Chicago organization put on a small meeting of its own. A panel discussion on THE BEST AND WORST OF SCIENCE FICTION featured Bob Tucker, Thomas Scortia and myself - - but as is usual whenever fans get together, the

highlight of the occasion was the social aspect.

The Chicago group is a particularly friendly one: they have a wonderful meeting-place in the Ida B. Noyes Hall on the university campus: they enjoy the advantages of critical perspicacity in their membership, and are singularly free from petty feuds and any air of rampant commercialism which all too often turns a so-called "science fiction club" into a thinly-disguised business organization.

As a result, the weekend was one long gabfest, featuring Joe Gibson and Roberta Collins Gibson (whose home I desecrated with my presence): the aforementioned Tucker and Scortia, plus several dozen other members of the group. As long as we're name-dropping, I'll mention Fritz Leiber, Frank Robinson, George W. Price, Sidney Coleman, Earl Kemp, Ed Wood, T. E. Dikty, Julian May, Ollie and Ginnie Saari, Elsie Janda, Mel Korshak and some local editor name of Hamling.

Whenever I read, in fanzines, about the horrible division between pros and fans, I am quickly reminded of groups and occasions such as this. At no time during the course of the entire weekend was there any schism, real or apparent.

The secret, if there is any, lay in the fact that the group wasn't so large as to become unwieldy. At a national convention, or for that matter, a regional convention such as the Midwestcon or Westercon, social affairs are hampered by certain natural laws.

Back in the latter days of the

eighteenth century, the Hindus demonstrated once and for all that if you jam too many people into too small a space the result will be the Black Hole of Calcutta.

And unfortunately, almost any major convention contains too many people to contain in a single hotel room, or even a suite: too many to sit *en masse* around a given table in any restaurant. Besides which, the poker-players tend to foregather in one area and so do the serious constructive thinkers and the serious destructive clinkers.

So inevitably some people feel "left out" or slighted. And inevitably, after every one of these major affairs, there are grumblings and repercussions - - directed largely at the pros or the Big Name Fans who are held "responsible" for the condition.

Hence it's reassuring to note that when a comparatively small number of fans gets together, the legend of "exclusiveness" fades away, as it should. Everybody seems to get along, and to have a good time. That certainly was the case in Chicago.

As this is being written, the first report has come in from England. Eric Bentcliffe, in a personal letter, writes that the Kettering Convention was a great success, with American attendees Shaw, Hoffman, Wilson and Kyle in ample evidence.

Last year an Anglofan showed up with half his mustache shaved off; this year he showed up with half his beard gone. Not to be outdone, Kyle shaved off his mustache completely - - after which he took a

poll to determine whether or not he looked better "before" or "after."

Although full reports on the voting are not yet available, the rough totals are as follows:

1. *Those in favor of Kyle with mustache* 11
2. *Those in favor of Kyle cutting off his mustache* 12
3. *Those in favor of Kyle cutting off his head* 36
4. *Those not in favor of Kyle under any circumstances* 4,386

With this inspiring thought in mind, let's gird our loins (ah there, you sex fiends!) and plunge into the turbulent maelstrom of magazines, battling the current of current fanzines.

THE FIRST ITEM at hand is the JOURNAL OF THE WORLD SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY, No. 1. This is actually the Progress Report on the 14th World Science Fiction Convention (P.O. Box 272, Radio City Station, New York 19, N.Y.). There's no charge for the issue - - all you do is mail in your \$2 membership fee for the Convention to the above address. The JOURNAL is a handsomely designed offset publication, giving the highlights and the lowdown on the coming Convention over Labor Day Weekend. It includes two fine articles on Guest-of-Honor Arthur C. Clarke and a detailed account of the Biltmore Hotel, which has been chosen as the scene of the crime. If you plan on attending, by all means send your money in now and get the Progress Reports as issued. If you plan to stay home, send in your \$2 anyway and find out what you're missing.

Next on the agenda is ALPHA (Dave Vendelmans, 130 Strydhof Ave., Berchem, Anvers, Belgium: irreg., no price). In addition to being the leading science-fiction fanzine now issued on the Continent, ALPHA is somewhat of a freak. It is really *two* magazines in one: an entirely separate issue is edited by Jan Jansen of 229 Berchemlei, Borgerhout, Belgium. The really curious part of this, though, lies in the fact that both magazines are bound together, back to back, with the Jansen section printed upside down.

This happens to intrigue me. Editor Vendelmans has an easy time of it, apparently, getting out his part of the issue in the conventional way. But think of what poor Jansen goes through! Printing all those pages *upside down* . . . bolting his mimeograph to the ceiling . . . walking around on the ceiling with suction-cups attached to his shoes. It seems like a tremendous effort, and I wonder how he manages to keep the ink from spilling or the paper from falling when he feeds it into the machine.

ALPHA would be recommended for this reason alone - - how often can you find an upside-down fanzine? - - but I hasten to add that the contents are also appealing. Editor Vendelmans has assembled a nice lineup of talent, and editor Jansen offers material by Bob Shaw and John Berry, among others. Well worth-while, even if you have to stand on your head to read it.

Here's the June issue of CANADIAN FANDOM (William D. Grant, 11 Burton Road, Toronto 10, On-

tario, Canada: 15c, 4/50c, quarterly) and as usual it's a reflection of the mature tastes of its editor. For proof of editorial maturity, I'd recommend **THE DECLINE AND FALL OF SOME**, in which Grant gives a shrewd general analysis of current fandom. Gerald Steward contributes an article, but the bulk of the issue is made up of reprint material, carefully selected. Four items from the '40s are featured - - and if you missed them, here's an opportunity to read some of the best fan-writing of that period. In addition, you'll find a reprint from a 1955 issue of **FAFHRD**, the disemvowelled fanzine. It's Don Wilson's scholarly dissertation on H. P. Lovecraft. This is a "must" for HPL fans, and even the Hatecraft faction could do well to study it as an example of how to write a really worthwhile essay.

SIGMA OCTANTIS (John Musells, 4 Curve St., Wakefield, Mass: sub. rates on request) is an interesting potpourri. I have a feeling that this 'zine is difficult to classify - - and the editor frankly states that he does not intend to "type" his publication.

From Texas comes **BOLIDE** (Don Powell, Box 7311, NTSC, Denton, Texas: 15c) which is dedicated to a revival of interest in "weird-fantasy". The emphasis in this first issue is on amateur fiction. My favorite in the issue is, a page burlesque of a typical "Letters to the Editor" column. All it needs are editorial comebacks initialed *wlh.*

Admirers of Pat Patterson's artwork (and I, for one, appreciate her form and lines) will want to

get hold of something called **HARD LINES** (P. Howard Lyons, PO Box 561, Adelaide PO, Toronto, Ontario, Canada). There is no regular publication date listed, and no price - - presumably because the Patterson illustrations are priceless. This is an OMPA (Off-Trial Magazine Publishers Association) effort. **KAPAI ON!** is also a Canadian export which can probably be obtained through the Lyons address. It features a Patterson cover and a variety of interesting articles, two of which I found particularly well worth reading. The first is a reprint of the Tom Lehrer LP record jacket (what, *you*, a professed fan, have never heard of Tom Lehrer? Rush down to your neighborhood record-shop and listen to his **WILD WEST** number). The second is a 1938 item by the late Ted Newman, entitled **WAS PROFESSOR RHINE HOODWINKED?** which should interest all ESPerantos.

England offers **ORION** (Paul Enever, 9 Churchill Ave, Hillingdon, Middlesex: bi-monthly, 50c per year) and unless I'm mistaken the 14th issue is beginning to resemble **HYPHEN** in both form and content. Contributors include Vin Clarke and John Berry, who is ripe.

If you've never encountered a Yobber, you'll be interested in **YOBBER** No. 3 (A&J Young, 10 Sumner Rd., Cambridge 38, Mass.: irreg; 10c). In addition to offering a wide range of yobbertunities you'll find some top-drawer letters from an imposing lineup of BNFs.

Here's the sixth issue of **OBLIQUE** (Clifford Gould, 1559 Cable St., San Diego, Calif.: bi-monthly;

15c or 7/\$1). In it you'll find an article by neo-fan Lee Hoffman, a blast from Dave Jenrette, a story by Ed Cox, and a thoughtful essay by Phillip K. Dick on PESSIMISM IN SCIENCE FICTION. In addition, more John Berry (whose output is unusually fruitful these days) and a continuation of Vernon L. McCain's HOW TO WIN READERS AND INFLUENCE BNFS, in which McCain continues his efforts to corrupt innocent fans by telling them how to go about editing a fanzine of their own. OBLIQUE is rapidly becoming one of the top 'zines in the field, and its editor is to be commended for his religious beliefs as stated on the cover.

A DEFINITE collector's item is HODGE-PODGE No. 15 (ML & N. Share, PO Box 31, Danville, Pa.: irreg.: 15c or 7/\$1). The reason being that this issue is the first one which does not contain any poetry. However, it *does* contain artwork by Rotsler, Bourne, Plato Jones and Nancy Share executed in the mammarable style for which HODGE-PODGE is famous. And it features the usual sprightly letter-column, plus editorial comment by Nancy and Marie-Louise, who are justly acclaimed in fandom as living dolls. If, as I do, you contend you're not too old to play with dolls, then drop a line to Danville.

The Anglofan version of HODGE-PODGE is called FEMIZINE (U.S. Representative, Dick Ellington, 299 Riverside Drive, New York 25: quarterly, 15c). Its new editress is Pamela Bulmer and issue No. 8

contains material by Roberta Wild, Ethel Lindsay, Francezka, Madeleine Willis and Diane Berry (John Berry's Other Wife). There is also an example of nepotism from H. Ken Bulmer, and a very interesting report on a German science-fiction convention by Anne Steul. The letter-column is typically topical and full of subject-matter.

John Berry (yes, *again!*) is represented in the fifth issue of PLOY (Ron Bennett, 7 Southway, Arthurs Avenue, Harrogate, Yorks., England: erratic, 15c) and there's a lineup of stout fellas plus expatriate Lee Hoffman.

Free-loaders can write to Larry S. Bourne, Box 5044, Portland, Oregon, for a copy of BRILLIG.

The third issue continues the editor's *ars grātia* policy and is heavy on artwork which should make him some bosom friends.

I wouldn't call SPECTRUM a fanzine in the true meaning of the term, but anyone on a serious constructive kick - - or for that matter, anyone who appreciates thoughtful essays and good writing - - will find it very rewarding. Write to Clarke L. Walser, 533 West Diversey Parkway, Chicago 14, Illinois: the sub rate is \$1.75 for two years, single copies 25c and worth it. The issue on hand contains a masterful article on future trends in clothing by Chicago fan Lewis Grant, and a fine dissertation on monopolistic practices by the editor. This isn't *avant garde* writing: just mature speculation. I enjoyed it and recommend it to fans who admire the PSYCHOTIC or SKY-HOOK or INSIDE type of 'zine.

Illinois is represented by several other entries this time around. First, there's STF-IN-GEN (Jerry DeMuth, 3223 Ernst St., Franklin Park, Ill.: irreg., 20c) which has an arresting cover by the editor, who also makes a sizeable contribution to the 34 pages which follow. There probably won't be another issue for a year, according to Jerry, but comments on the present job will be welcomed.

From the wilds of Roseville comes NANDU (Nan Gerding, Box 484, Roseville, Ill.). This is a SAPSzine - - that is to say, a mailing contribution to the Spectator Amateur Press Society - - and you'll have to write Mrs. Gerding directly for available issues. But NANDU, like Sam Moskowitz, thrives on controversy, and controversialists will probably enjoy it.

YANDRO continues to appear from the Coulsons, at 407½ East 6th St., North Manchester, Indiana: monthly, 5c per each. The editors describe it as "strictly a low-pressure fanzine, put out for the enjoyment of the editors and anyone else who enjoys this sort of thing" and I think they are unduly modest.

Not sharing this quality, I'm going to mention that there's still *another* issue of SCIENCE FICTION WORLD (The Gnome Press, 80 East 11th St., New York. irreg.: 10c) edited by Bob Tucker and yours truly Jack the Ripper. This over-size 4-pager manages to crowd a surprising amount of wordage in, and contains news reports on fandom and prodrom, book reviews, movie reviews, fanzine reviews, editorial comments, fiction, and just

about everything the editors can think of. Well, not *everything* - - we've got to consider the censors. Actually, this effort defies description. It defies the readers, too. You'll just have to find out about it on your own: LIFE MAGAZINE would describe it as "THE POLICE GAZETTE of the Science Fiction field."

INSIDE (Ron Smith, 611 W. 114th St., New York 25: bi-monthly, 5/\$1) makes its usual welcome appearance - - and what an appearance it is, with a striking two-color cover illo by Pat Patterson, and the talented services of six other artists for interiors. This March issue is a "must" for two categories of fans; those who admire H. P. Lovecraft and those who detest him. Admirers are going to be very pleased with the reprint of one of HPL's most thoughtful essays - - *Idealism and Materialism* - - which might well serve as his personal credo. They will also be happy with Lin Carter's thorough bibliography of the books, real and imaginary, referred to in Lovecraft's stories.

Those who dislike HPLoquence can gloat over John Brunner's *Rusty Chains*, rattling loudly in protest against the man's prose, poetry, and viewpoint. And those who don't care much one way or the other can still examine Tucker's news-letter, or a new poem by Randall Garrett. Mr. Garrett, the Dylan Thomas of science-fiction, has this time elected an offtrail theme which carries penetrating philosophic and sociological connotations. Those of us who admire Garrett as a Deep Thinker cannot

fail to catch the electric implications in this work, while at the same time wondering why he didn't sell this particular bit of verse to *ROGUE* magazine.

As a matter of fact, it's my opinion that just about everything in *INSIDE* is of "professional" quality: oldtime fans who remember Laney's *ACOLYTE* and Earl Kemp's *DESTINY* will find much of the same flavor and spirit in its pages.

And now for a quick look at the very latest arrivals, before this installment goes to press.

A *BAS* (Boyd Raeburn, 9 Glenvalley Drive, Toronto 9, Canada: irreg., 25c) offers an outstanding eighth issue featuring the famous and infamous *DERELICTI DEROGATION*, a learned dialogue by Bob Tucker and *HOW TO BE A JAZZ SNOB*, by Alex Barris. This last is one of the funniest bits in years, and well-written enough to stack up with anything on the subject ever printed in a so-called "slick" professional magazine. Dig this.

SATA (Dan Adkins, PO Box 258, Luke Air Force Base, Glendale Ariz.: bi-monthly, 10c) makes its first appearance in mimeo, and two-color mimeo at that. Heavy on the fiction, it is presumably in the formative stages, and the editor would doubtless appreciate material.

VOID (Greg Benford, HQ 594th F. A. Bn., APO 169 New York; irreg.: 10c) has a continental flavor these days. European fans report on European fanactivity, and there's a comprehensive letter and review column.

The cover of the February *FRONTIER* (Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis 22, Minn.: irreg., 50c) is just about the handsomest reproduction seen in years. This is a rocketzine, the official bulletin of The Society For the Advancement of Space Travel, and you won't find anything about the lousiness of Yngvi or the unseaworthiness of Courtney's boat in these pages. But it's a competent journal for spacecats. See you later, astrogator.

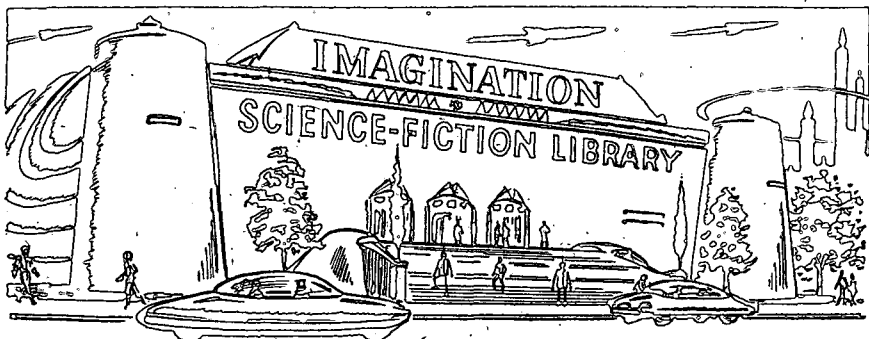
Those who believe saucers were meant to fly as well as to drink out of will want to get hold of *THE SAUCERIAN REVIEW* (Gray Barker, Box 2228, Clarksburg, West Va.; \$1.50) which is a well-done offset job of 100 pages containing photographs, diagrams, artwork, and comprehensive textual material on UFO.

Before I call it a day (actually, it's a night) I'd like to pass along a special message to all fans in the neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts.

Alma Hill, secretary of the *SCIENCE AND FICTION CRITICS CLUB*, 230 Clarendon Street, Boston, Mass., is anxious to contact local fans interested in joining this newly-formed group. Although at present it consists mainly of adults, there is no restriction as to age of potential members. There's a centrally-located clubhouse and an ambitious program of planned activities. If you're interested in joining, contact Alma Hill directly at the above address.

And that does it for this issue. Time to close *FANDORA'S BOX* once again.

—Robert Bloch



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

THE POWER

by Frank M. Robinson, \$3.00 219 pages, J. B. Lippincott Company, New York, N.Y.

This remarkable *tour de force* is not what we think of as science fiction, but it contains enough of the jargon to permit its inclusion in that category. It is a "chase" story and once you've started it, well . . .

With consummate skill, of the kind not seen since Eric Frank Russell's masterpieces, this new novelist proceeds to postulate the existence of an "Uebermensch", a man with telekinetic powers, a man of ruthless egoism, whose quarry is the assemblage of scientists aware of his existence.

Professor Tanner is the hero through whose eyes you see, and senses you feel, the quickening of

the chase. The book is nine-tenths chase and it is impossible to describe it in any detail without revealing the plot. I might add that the denouement completely is beyond logical deduction.

The scenes often occur in a quiet university town or in the anonymity of a big city. Robinson manages to suggest that these familiar haunts are the places where spine-chilling terror is unavoidable.

You've finished a cup of coffee at an all-night restaurant. The streets are deserted. The summery night is oppressive in its solitude. You see no one as you walk along quickly — and then you hear the footsteps — they grow louder, you sense the tendrils of something strange — and you break into a run. Fear holds

you close, your brain tells you that you can't escape, and you run . . .

Of this kind of thing, many writers manage a short story, a few manage chapters in a novel, but for a solid two hundred pages, Robinson makes you believe that the chase is as real as life itself.

To put down on paper the stuff of which terror and fear are made, to convey even obliquely a hint of what "the moment of truth" is like is a terribly difficult thing to do. It is to Robinson's credit that he has achieved this.

Ever since the bug-eyed monster vanished from printed fiction, (to reappear as Hollywood s-f!) there has been a vast demand for first rate work. I predict that a name you will be seeing along with that of Van Vogt, Heinlein and Clarke, is the name of the author of **THE POWER**.

If you are tired of the trite, the puerile, the trivial, and if you want the vicarious thrill of dying the thousand deaths, put down that whodunit and buy **THE POWER!**

★ ★ ★

EARTHMAN, COME HOME

by James Blish, 239 pages, \$3.50, G. Putnam & Sons, New York, N. Y.

James Blish is a good writer—his shorter stories are memorable. This novel very well demonstrates his virtuosity with words and his admirable and skillful handling of an advanced technology.

Imagine a time, not so many centuries hence, as technology goes these days, when men can lift cities into space! The canvas is the Galaxy, the subjects cities. It is a future Renaissance Italy in form, the cities *condottiere*. With this improbable—but rich—panoply Blish creates a tremendous adventure story. Good characterization, a realistic technical jargon (but an absurd sociology), and fast pace, gives the novel a legitimate place in the considerable catalogue of super space-opera—but it's far above the material ordinarily designated by that term.

Now, having said all these nice

things about the story, I must say that, for me at least, it does not come off. I think it was the unreality of the social organization of the Galaxy perhaps—but I won't attempt any such analytical criticism. Stories with these ideas fall out of the scope of conventional dissection.

I am angry probably, that Blish, skilled as he is, wasted his time with this "epic" sort of thing. Really there is no reason for it; conflicts nearer the human level would be much better—why the Universe?

If you want a Campbell-Smith type of thing done with incomparable sophistication, this is your dish.

I trespass when I suggest Blish choose different material, but I think it a valid suggestion. I don't know how popular the "ultra-epic" is; I question that, but then there are other reasons for writing as well. Try again J. B.!

★ ★ ★

etters from the eaders

ALAS, NO WOES . . .

Dear Bill Hamling:

After reading the letters in the June issue of MADGE I began to wonder—does anyone dislike your magazine? Further research on this question—through other recent issues—revealed little criticism.

Since this situation obviously had to be remedied, I began to search for something to complain about. And found—nothing.

This was a catastrophe. It might even be necessary to compliment you! In fact, it is. All the stories were very enjoyable; the cartoons and interior illos were superb.

In closing let me congratulate Henry Bott in particular; he finally read a book he doesn't like!

Marcy Stofman
 7102 Ventnor Ave.
 Ventnor City, N. J.

We're glad your close examination was fruitless—in the critical sense, of course! And being very modest we blushingly accept your compliment . . . But wait—you mean

to say you just found one book that Hank Bott didn't like? Come now, where were you when the now classic Bott-Asimov controversy blazed through stf? Now that we reflect on it, that debate was a lot of fun. Tennis, anyone? wh

“THOUGHTFUL” YARNS

Dear Bill:

I received the June MADGE a few days ago, and after reading the letter section decided to get my two cents worth in on a couple of things.

Perhaps H. Taylor was doubtful if he should have said all he did after he wrote his letter, and so tried to remain rather anonymous with just an initial. And I think he had good reason for doing so.

A good portion of science fiction today consists of stories where the author points out something he feels is wrong in our world by magnifying it in a future setting. Occasionally someone may holler about a story like that because he

feels it's directed at him. While H. Taylor might be able to buy a scandal mag with as factual a story, I doubt that it would be as entertaining reading. I thought EVERY BODY'S HAPPY BUT ME (February issue) was good reading and that is all that matters as far as I'm concerned. As for MEETING AT THE SUMMIT, I can imagine very few people who would vote one way or the other because of that story!

Concerning theological plots: Off-hand I could find only a couple other than PATROL (October '52) which you mentioned. These were THE MAN Thrilling Wonder Stories February '49 issue, by Ray Bradbury, and THE STAR, Infinity, November, 1955 issue, by Arthur C. Clarke.

Keep up the good work on MADGE.

Dwight E. Agner
Rt. 2

Continental, Ohio

We doubt that "H" Taylor was trying to remain anonymous, but suggest to "H" that next time he writes he include his first name. Incidentally, we'd like to suggest that to everybody who writes in. Here at MADGE we're as friendly as a group of Martian sand-pups. We all like the first name approach so let's make it a rule. wth

HE HEARD WRONG!

Dear Bill:

You probably won't be able to print this letter, since it's from a thirteen-year-old and I've heard only adults can be "true" science

fiction fans But, there are a few questions I'd like to ask so I'll take a chance.

1. MADGE once printed a story by Dan Galouye entitled, RE-BIRTH. Was this story any "relation" to REBIRTH by John Wyndham?

2. I've just received some back issues of MADGE I ordered and note that in recent years MADGE has 130 pages compared to 160 previously. Why?

3. How come MADGE no longer prints the word count of the stories on the contents page?

4. Where can I obtain issues one through nine of MADGE?

5. When is MADGE going monthly?

I think your policy of illustrating the lead novel on the front cover is a good one. And while I'm talking about lead stories, try and get more work by Edmond Hamilton.

Walter Shamest
850 Bryant Ave.
Bronx, 59; N.Y.

We can't imagine any "true" sf fan putting an age requirement into the field. Fact of the matter is that science fiction fans (if you use IQ factors as a guide) are ALL adult. This is certainly not true about other fields of literature! Now to answer your questions: 1. No connection, simply coincidence of title. 2. The page cut was an economy move during a poor sales period. Now because paper costs have since risen, we're reluctant to increase the size of the magazine. But most readers don't complain—MADGE still gives more than its

share of good science fiction reading! 3. No good reason to offer. We just got into the habit of doing it this way. You'll note that our companion book, *IMAGINATIVE TALES* lists word count. Chalk it up to editorial eccentricity. 4. We'd like to know too. We get a load of requests every month for the first nine issues of *MADGE*. Frankly, we barely have an office file. Suggest you visit a few second-hand book stores. You might be lucky and find a few copies. Or, perhaps some reader will contact you if he has a few to sell. 5. No plans for the present. In effect we do have a monthly, with *IMAGINATIVE TALES* alternating with *IMAGINATION* every-other-month. More Ed Hamilton coming up. But for fast service you've got him in the lead spot this issue! wh

CONFIDENCE SHAKEN

Dear Bill Hamling:

I've been reading *MADGE* for about four years via subscription. Up until this time I have never been sorry. Then the June issue came along. As is my habit, I read the short stories first. Now that was a mistake. I seriously considered forgetting *MADGE* and all other sci-fi magazines — because it's a cinch that if your publications can't come up with good stories, then no one else can. (Sort of a back-handed compliment!)

But luckily for both of us Alexander Blade restored my faith in *MADGE* with his magnificent novel; *BATTLE FOR THE STARS* and I will thus continue to part

with three bucks every time my subscription is up for renewal. So herewith I extend my subscription — which will show you just what one story can do!

. . . . Seems I recall reading a story in one of your magazines about a planet to planet hunting expedition, with various types of cunning villains. One in particular was a mist that engulfed a whole system and fed on life itself. Can you tell me what issue that was in?

Lionel B. Newton

330 N. Folsom

Coquille, Ore.

We never underestimate the power of a single story to satisfy a reader. Actually, it is rarely that any one reader will enjoy all the stories in an issue. Personal references are quite diverse. While we try to please the majority at all times, we only hope that at least one yarn per issue leaves a strong impression . . . Could be the story you refer to was *THE FINAL QUARRY* in the May 1956 issue of *IMAGINATIVE TALES*. Back issues of *TALES* are available so refer to coupon in any issue of *TALES* currently on sale.

. wh

GOOD FOR ALEX!

Dear Bill:

I bought the June issue of *MADGE* today and couldn't put it down until I finished it. I find that I like *MADGE* so much now that I read it as soon as I buy it, which is not true of other mags. That cover by Malcolm Smith was the first thing to catch my eye on the stands. An interplanetary cov-

er will always grab my eye!

Naturally, the best story in the issue was **BATTLE FOR THE STARS** by Alex Blade. I want you to know I enjoyed the story so much I now rank Blade as one of the best writers in the business.

DALRYMPLE'S EQUATION was well-plotted, but the characterization was terrible. And **GUNNISON'S BONANZA** just couldn't hold my interest. However I finished the yarn and admit I liked the ending. **PLANET OF DOOM** was extremely well-written despite the fact that the Mandmooran Chief and the Medicine Man spoke like American Indians! Who in the galaxy dug up that "Mandmooran" name? Real gone. I rank this yarn second in the issue.

Ivar Jorgensen really goofed on **MYSTERY AT MESA FLAT**: It was poorly written and the characters were stereotyped. Indeed poor.

THE OBEDIENT SERVANT, I liked.

Incidentally, I'd like any teenage fans in this area to contact me, object to form a stf club.

Marty Fleischman
1247 Grant Ave.
Bronx 56, N. Y.

We agree—naturally!—that Alex did a real fine job with his novel. Wait until you read his next one—it's even better! You've got a start for your club in this issue, Marty, just contact Walt Shamest... wth

WE FLIPPED TOO!

Dear Bill Hamling:

Just writing a note to let you know your last few issues have been

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really on the ball. Especially the short stories, like those in the June issue. Yarns like THE OBEDIENT SERVANT, MYSTERY AT MESA FLAT, and DALRYMPLE'S EQUATION:

Incidentally, I took one look at your new book-subscription offer on page 130 and flipped. Man, they're the most. You can look forward to receiving mine!

One more thing, I have some books and magazines to sell or trade; any interested readers contact me.

Ted Bliss
1727 Schiller Ave.
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

Hope the rest of our readers will flip too, Ted. Come to think of it, we'd like to plug subscriptions with ALL of our readers; \$3 is not much money as dough goes these days. It'll buy you little more than a carton of cigarettes, actually. In MADGE's case it buys you 12 issues and a FREE hard-cover science fiction book for your library shelf—worth the FULL price of the subscription alone. That sub means a lot to us—it helps swell our controlled circulation for advertising purposes, and of course, on volume basis increases our operating fund to improve the magazine. (Such as the use of two-color inside the book. MADGE and IMAGINATIVE TALES are the only magazines in the field giving you that bonus!) So why don't you—and we do mean YOU—send us your three bucks right now, today, and let us know in that solid way of showing it that you really like us. Clip the coupon on page 130

and send it in—now with

RELIABLE STAFF -

Dear Bill Hamling:

First of all let me congratulate you on the acquisition of Robert Bloch to the staff of MADGE as reviewer for FANDORA'S BOX. Not that I didn't enjoy Mari Wolf's column. But you'll have to admit that Bob Bloch's knack for humor is difficult to beat. Matter of fact, that opening of his in the June issue was almost the highspot of the entire magazine!

I have noticed that a large part of your staff of writers and artists were with you years ago when you were managing editor of AMAZING STORIES. Names such as Henry Bott, Malcolm Smith—and of course, Alexander Blade. I have been reading some of Blade's stories in old issues of AMAZING recently. However, none of his past stories equals BATTLE FOR THE STARS in the June issue of MADGE. Blade's description of the nebulae and other space phenomena is among the best I've read anywhere, and comes closest to the panorama of space which you seek in stories.

PLANET OF DOOM does not contain the breath-taking descriptive passages of the Blade story, but it has quite a novel plot and C. H. Thames can be proud of a solid story. Of the balance of the short stories, only THE OBEDIENT SERVANT is passable, due to its hard-hitting climax.

Malcolm Smith's cover is all one could ask for—yet I'd like to see another McCauley painting soon.

Kenn Curtis
4722 Peabody Ave.
Cincinnati 27, Ohio

McCauley is busy in the art end of TV movies, but we hope he'll find time to do another cover soon with

NEW TO STF

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I am a girl of thirteen and love to read anything about space. Thus it was I saw your June issue of IMAGINATION at the local drug-store. Strangely, this was the first science fiction magazine that attracted my eye—guess it was the cover that did it! Anyhow, I bought

the issue—and enjoyed everything in it. Especially the novel, BATTLE FOR THE STARS.

I am going to start buying all issues of IMAGINATION I can find!

Miss L. E. Sprague
422 S. North St.
Otsego, Mich.

Welcome into the science fiction fold! It's always a pleasure to meet a brand new reader, and we certainly hope we'll be hearing from you again!—While you're looking for new issues of IMAGINATION, don't forget our companion science fiction magazine, IMAGINATIVE TALES with

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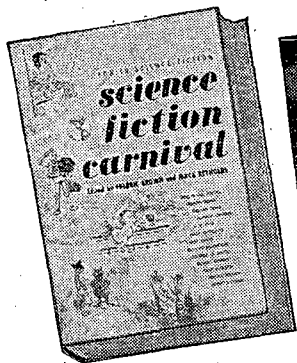
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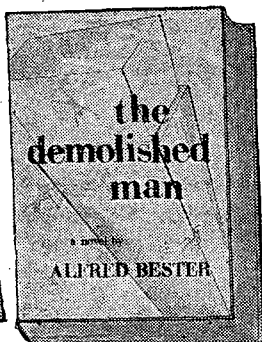
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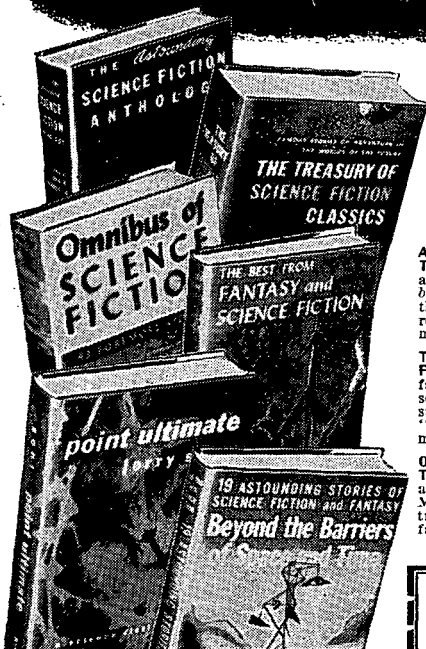
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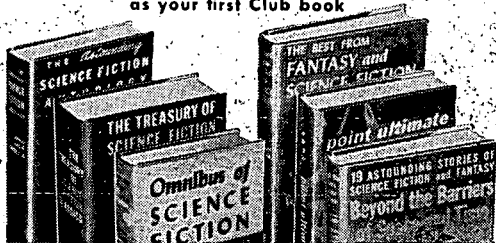
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